

**TALES FOR CHILDREN
FROM MANY LANDS**

EDITED BY F. C. TILNEY

VOLUMES IN THIS SERIES

**KING ARTHUR AND HIS ROUND TABLE
GULLIVER'S TRAVELS
ENGLISH FAIRY TALES
THE WATER BABIES
PINOCCHIO
PERRAULT'S FAIRY TALES
TALES FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS
FAIRY TALES FROM SPAIN
FEATS ON THE FIORD
ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY OUTLAWS
ROBINSON CRUSOE
THE SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON**

ROBIN HOOD
AND HIS
MERRY OUTLAWS

Retold by
F. C. TILNEY

Illustrated by
IONE RAILTON

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INTRODUCTION

THIS modest tale does not pretend to be more than a paraphrase of the finest and most rational ballads in the Robin Hood cycle. Of these, *The Lytell Geste*, as given by Ritson, has afforded a backbone to what must otherwise have proved an invertebrate narration of promiscuous incidents. Into the epic sequence of *The Lytell Geste* the episodes of certain other ballads have been inserted in the hope that a consistent whole would result.

As to the date of Robin Hood, the question, "under which king?" appears to have been much discussed in recent centuries. Being myself without authority I have yielded to conviction in deference to the arguments of Joseph Hunter, L.S.A. (Historical Tracts, *The Great Hero of Romance, Robin Hood*, 1852), and have sided with Edward II. in preference to Richard I.

The most casual study of the ballads reveals the fact that the later ones are in most cases but variants of the older, and as it happens that the older are usually more virile and more convincing, they have been chosen here as furnishing stronger material. To take an instance : an itinerant potter might well make a short cut through a wood from one town to another ; but a butcher does not seem a likely tradesman to have hawked his goods so far afield. The choice, therefore, falls upon *Robin Hood and the Potter*, although the ballad of *Robin Hood and the Butcher* deals with the same incidents.

The derivative origin of many of these poems is further emphasised by certain characteristics which constantly appear in them; for example, the outlaw's ruse of disguises and his aggressive bouts with one person and another, wherein he usually gets a sound trouncing and cries for mercy. Such characteristics do not redound to the moral credit or physical prowess of a hero; therefore a ballad here and there has been omitted solely on account of some such discreditable performance. A man who was evidently a people's hero and set afoot the tradition of bravery, generosity, and nobility must be unfairly represented by balladmongers who take over and over again as their theme, just for the fun of the situation, an incident that may have once occurred and been recorded.

- The re-telling of these ballads has been faithful to the originals, and no fresh imaginary exploits have been added. The only liberty allowed has been a little filling in where the narrative was too thin to carry easy conviction to the youthful mind.

F. C. TILNEY.

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ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRY OUTLAWS

I

THE KNIGHT DINES WITH THE FORESTERS

AT the beginning of the fourteenth century, when Edward II. reigned, there might have been seen one day in the deep and famous woods of Barnsdale, in Yorkshire, four men who appeared to be idling, for they were not walking the beaten path as men do who have business in hand, neither did they seem to be bent on pleasure as people are who go to the woods for merry-making. One of them was leaning against a tree. He was clad in a tunic of cloth that went by the name of Lincoln green, for it was at Lincoln, in these days, that the best green dye was

made, and foresters liked to wear green cloth because that colour could not easily be distinguished amongst the leaves. The man wore a leather cap or hood, and over his shoulders was a baldric embroidered with silver supporting a broadsword and a hunting knife. A horn also was slung across his body, and in his belt was stuck a sheaf of about a dozen arrows; whilst a bow, six feet in length, rested by his side against the tree. The bearing of this man was noble, and from the fact that his three companions stood around him as though awaiting his orders there could be no doubt that he was the chief or leader of the party, although all the men were dressed in the same way and each had a bow and arrows.

One of these men was uncommonly tall, and another was just as uncommonly short and thick-set too, whilst the third was of ordinary appearance.

"Methinks, master," said the tall man, "that if thou wouldst dine betimes thy dinner would do thee more good than if thou didst fast longer."

"No, no, my worthy Little John," answered the chief, "I do not dine without some stranger guest who will pay for the meal. I care not whether he be baron or earl, or knight or squire, so long as he hath money enough."

"Then, master," replied Little John, "'twere need that thou shouldst tell us where to go and where to find this same guest."

"That ye must do as best ye may; only mark that ye do not disobey me in what ye know is my will: that ye do no harm to any husbandman, nor any good yeoman who cometh through the wood; nor any good knight nor good squire that ye know for a good fellow. And, above all, that ye at no time offer discourtesy to any woman, nor to

any company that hath a woman in it. But proud archbishops and bishops—these ye may beat and bind if ye like. And as for the high sheriff of Nottingham, have him in mind always, so that he doth not escape when ye spy him. I trow a good few old scores of his yet to wipe off that were gotten in Sherwood."

"This we understand," said Little John, "and are content to keep the law to the letter. Well, Heaven send us a guest before the day goes much further."

"Good then ! Take thy bow and arrows, and let Mutch go with thee, and Scathelock too for that matter ; for I would be alone for a little. Walk up towards the Watling Street, where for a certainty ye shall meet some one, and whoever he be bring him hither to our lodge, and we will requite him with a dinner."

Off went the three men and came to the great Roman road which is called Watling Street. They looked to east and to west, but saw no one. Their hunger was growing keen, and the empty road seemed to put dinner further off than ever. At last they went towards Barnsdale by a path that was hidden, and there they met a knight riding towards them. They waited with much joy till he came up with them, and then they saw him to be a dreary figure who seemed much cast down. One of his feet was out of its stirrup and swinging carelessly. His hood was hanging over his eyes, and his simple and poor array bespoke him the saddest and sorriest man they ever met in a summer's day.

Little John drew near him very cautiously, went down on one knee, and said, "Thou art welcome, gentle knight. Welcome to the greenwood. For thee my master hath waited fasting these three hours."

"Who is thy master?" asked the knight.

"Robin Hood."

"He is a good yeoman. I have heard much good of him, and since needs be, my friends, I yield. Take me where ye will. Albeit I had proposed to dine at Blythe or Doncaster to-day." So on they went, the knight full of care and saying little, whilst the tears ran down his cheek.

When they were come to the foresters' lodge, which they had built in the wood, they found the chief, Robin Hood, standing at the door. At the sight of the knight he doffed his cap and bent his knee. "A welcome, sir knight!" he cried. "Full three hours have I waited for thee fasting."

"God save thee, Robin Hood, and thy good company!" replied the guest. Then they all washed themselves and heard three masses before they sat down to dine. Their meat was good red deer, pheasant, and swan and river fowl, with many a little bird bred in the woods, and plenty of bread and wine. "Sir knight," said Robin, "do thy best." They fell to without any waste of more words—their jaws very busy, but not with speech—until their appetites were spoiled, and then the feast grew merry and noisy.

"Such a dinner as this I have not had for three weeks," exclaimed the guest as he pushed back his platter, "and, Robin, if ever I come hitherward again, I'll make as good a dinner for thee as thou hast made for me."

"It was never yet my plan to beg a dinner of any man," said Robin. "Methinks it right to pay before parting, yet it would not be goodly manners that a yeoman should pay for a knight."

"All the money I have to pay with," answered the

guest, "is so little that for very shame I cannot tell thee how much it is."

Hereupon Robin told Little John to go and look in the knight's wallet to find out the truth of this. Then turning to the visitor he said: "Tell me plainly the truth, sir knight."

"Ten shillings is all I have."

Said Robin, "If thou hast no more than that, I'll take no penny of it; but if thou hast need of more I'll lend it thee."

Now had Little John spread the knight's mantle on the ground and opened his coffer, and, lo! there was but half a pound. Leaving it there he came to his master, and, bowing, said, "Sir, the knight is true to a penny."

At this Robin was greatly pleased. "Fill! Fill up with wine," he cried, and they drank and were merry.

Marvelling at the threadbare coat and the poverty of his guest, Robin put to him some questions as to how this state of things had come to pass: whether by chance he had been forced by the king to become a knight when he could but ill afford that condition of life (for that is what the kings in these days often did, demanding large sums from the unfortunate yeomen who declined the honour). He inquired further whether bad husbandry or misfortune or usury or prodigality had brought his estate so low.

"No such charges can be laid against me," answered the knight. "My ancestors have been noble for a hundred years back. But poverty, soon or late, may come to every man, Robin, and God alone then may mend his state. My neighbours would tell you that for three years past I could spend my four hundred pounds a year. Now, alas! I have little but my wife and children."

"But what evil hap hath lost thee all thy wealth?"

"Listen, and I'll tell thee the whole tale. I had a son who should have been my heir. When he was scarce twenty he would take the field in a joust with any man. But his ill luck caused him to slay a knight of Lancashire, and to save him from the vengeance of the law all my money hath gone and my goods have been sold. To the Abbey of St. Mary my lands have all been pawned. The amount of the pledge is four hundred pounds, and if I pay it not to-morrow the abbey will keep my fair lands for ever. As for me, I shall leave this country and go across the sea to Palestine and see Mount Calvary where Our Lord lived and died. So fare ye well, my friends! Long days and good be yours! For me things will never be better." His tears fell again as he rose to leave. "Farewell! I can pay ye no more."

"Where are thy friends?" asked Robin.

"Alas! sir, when I was rich at home I boasted many: now they run from me like wild beasts. They either shun my face or will not know it."

Then Little John himself wept in pity, and Scathelock and Mutch were thoughtful as to the turns of fate.

"The best cheer is the best wine," exclaimed Robin Hood, "so fill up again and tell me, sir knight, what sureties ye have for repayment."

"I have none, unless it be Our Lady herself, who never failed me until now."

"I never found better surety than Our Lady dear, so come thou, Little John, and go to my treasury, and bring me four hundred pounds."

Nothing pleased Little John better. Away he went and Scathelock and Mutch with him, and they told out four hundred pounds for the knight.

"Master, his clothing is worn thin," said the henchman. "Wilt thou not give him a livery? I dare vow no merchant in England is so rich in clothing as thou."

"Well said, Little John! Take thou of red and of green three yards each, good measure." So Little John took his six feet bow for a yard-measure, and even then jumped three feet at every handful.

Said Mutch, "A devil's draper thou, to give such measure as that."

But Scathelock laughed as he looked on. "Little John may well give the very best measure," he said, "for the stuff cost him little enough."

Then Little John spoke up again. "What about a horse, master, to take all these goods home?"

"Let him have the grey courser, and find him a new saddle."

"And a palfrey too," said little Mutch, "and a pair of boots; for a gentle knight cannot go without boots."

"What do you add, Little John?" asked Robin.

"I would give a pair of gilt spurs, sir, that he may ever pray for all this company, and may God lift him out of his sorrow!"

The knight was overcome by this kindness. He asked them to say a day when it should be all repaid. "Let it be this day twelvemonth," said the forest king, "under this very tree; and since it is a shame that a knight should ride alone without squire or yeoman or page, I shall lend thee as well Little John, my man. He will stand thee in good stead for a yeoman, and, if need be, act well in thy defence, I warrant him."

II

OF LITTLE JOHN AND WILL STUTELY

So the knight and Little John went away together through the wood as the day drew on and the sunbeams slanted amongst the leaves. Deep were the thoughts of the grateful man. He blessed the bold and generous ranger who had saved him from shame and beggary. He blessed the ready sympathy of Little John, and Scathelock, and Mutch. In all his doings with the world he had never known such free, open, and ready kindness from the hands of citizens, warriors, or priests as that day had been offered him by men who were known as outlaws and robbers.

"Bethink you, good man, that we shall reach York to-night?" he asked at length of his companion.

"Ay, and easily if thou wilt. But methought 'twas to-morrow that your payment was due to these same fat thieves of St. Mary's!"

"Thou'rt right, Little John. To-morrow must this four hundred pounds be counted down or my land is lost for ever. But, nevertheless, I would not risk a delay. By sunrise I shall assail them, and at York I would that we should sleep to awake in readiness."

"So let it be, sir knight. We shall sleep in York to-night."

Then, as they journeyed on, they fell to talking of other

matters. The knight began to question his groom about the valiant Robin and his band, to which he got answers as suited the wariness of the squire.

"And now tell me, good forester, how it cometh about that one of your measure should be called little. I trow that thy captain's bow would not reach the top of thy head by a foot or so, and that bow is measure for two yards as the citizen pays out cloth; but not, I ween, as ye jolly sylvan merchants are wont to traffic."

"'Tis nought but a jest, sir knight, and a merry one enough to any that are new to it; but as for myself and the others, it has long lost its savour. I'll tell thee all. My name it is John Little, and so I was first christened; but these merry asses here must needs christen me again and turn my name about. 'Twas Robin himself though that felt the water first."

"How was that, friend? Tell thy tale. It promises to be a welcome beguiling of the journey."

"Here it is then. 'Twas many a year ago, and Robin was but a stripling of twenty or so. I met him a-coming along a plank bridge over a river. I was a jolly brisk blade myself then, and no shorter than I am now, and people would run rather than turn a staff with me, I warrant thee! Well, along comes Master Robin and hollas to me to hold since there was scant room for us to pass. I gave him the same courtesy you may be sure, and told him what I took him for. At this, out he fetches an arrow and was for fitting it to the bow, when I roared out that I'd liquor his hide if he did but offer to touch the string. Quoth he to me, 'Thou dost prate like an ass, for were I to let fly, my dart would be through thee before thou couldst get near enough to strike a first blow.' He

was making ready again when I cried out, 'Coward ! There thou standest with a long bow, able to shoot me, and I have nought but a staff and cannot get at thee,' and all this time I was running up to him. So now we were at close quarters, and Robin he lays his bow aside and says, 'Coward thou callst me ? I scorn that name, and will get me a staff too and try thy manhood, my fine fellow.' Then he stepped into a thicket and cut himself a neat staff of oak. Out he comes twirling it in his fingers, and his face all a-grin. 'See,' says he, 'here is a staff lusty and tough. Now let us play away on this bridge, and he who knocks the other in shall win.' 'With all my heart,' I cried, 'for I shall give out in no other way, I promise thee, Master Archer.' Then we fell to, and I soon found that he had handled a staff before in his life. But I was tall and heavy and had the advantage. He got the first bang, and a mighty one it was, and says I, 'I must pay thee that back. Never fear, I'll bring you as good as you bring. I'll never die in debt, friend, as long as I can hold a stick.' Then at it we go again like threshing corn. Oh, what a merry fight it was, and how we kept it up ! At last a crack of mine on his pate drew the red wine out of it, and then dear Robin grew a little angered, and went at me for his life. He sweated like a bull and smoked as though he had been on fire. And then I woke up too, and fetched him a crack that knocked him into the river. 'Prithee, good fellow,' I hollaed, 'where art thou gone ?' and I nearly fell in myself for laughing. Then up came his head and, 'Here I am, off with the tide,' he says, and picks himself up and wades to the bank. 'Thou'rt a brave soul, that I acknowledge,' he says, as he pulls himself out by the branch of a thorn, and then he

blew a loud blast on his horn, after he had shaken the water out of it, and before you could have walked ten paces there were bowmen all around, as though they had sprung up out of the ground. Every man was in Lincoln green. Up come they to Robin, with 'Oho! what's amiss?' One, Will Stutely, says, 'Good master, you're wet to the skin!' 'Small wonder,' says Robin, 'this handy lad you see here has tumbled me into the water.' So at that they came at me and would have given me a ducking in turn, but Robin made them forbear. Then he turned to me and said, 'Be not afraid, friend, no one shall harm thee. These bowmen are my followers. Three score and nine of them there are, and if you will join us there will be even numbers. Wilt thou be one of my brave boys?' An thou wilt, a livery awaits thee and all the accoutrements. Speak up, my jolly blade. Thou shalt learn how we shoot the fat deer.' I did not wait to be asked again. I gave him my hand on it and swore to serve him through thick and thin. 'My name's John Little,' I said. 'That must be altered,' quoth William Stutely, 'and I'll be his godfather.' We had a mighty feast then in the woods, sir knight, believe me; a brace of fat does and strong liquor. After that all the men stood in a ring, and Will Stutely he baptised me with a bucket of water. He stood forth and said: 'This yeoman is called John Little; but now we'll turn his name about. Let him be known for evermore as Little John.' At that they all shouted, and then went back to the wine. Robin Hood he takes his pretty babe and dresses him in green from top to toe. He gave me a long bow and said, 'Now, Little John, thou shalt be an archer and range the forest with us, where we never want for gold and silver whilst

the bishops have any in their purses.' So that is how I came to be called Little John, sir knight."

"A rare tale, by my troth, and well told. Is it perchance also because our good friend Mutch is small that he beareth the name?"

"True, sir knight, thou hast hit it. Mutch is a good lad, and his father was a miller."

"What of the man ye called Will Stutely?"

"Ah, he is a fine marksman too! Once he came near to hanging, but we saved him."

"Why, how was that?"

"The sheriff's varlets surprised him, and they clapped him in prison. When Robin heard news of it he was away to him in a trice. Two of the varlets told Will he would be hanged on the morrow, and he turned on them and slew them then and there. When we went to him we were all in green but Robin, and he wore scarlet. We had each a sword and a bow, and, by St. George, we made a brave show. When we had got near to the castle where Will lay, we stopped in ambush. Robin he sent a boy out to get some news. The boy he went up to a palmer, who stood beneath the castle wall, and says he, 'Tell me, old man, dost know when Will Stutely must die, who is here a prisoner?' 'Alas!' says the palmer, 'this very day, and if his master knew it he would soon have a posse of yeomen to fetch him hence.' 'Ay, that is true enough,' said the youth, 'and if he be hanged, his death will be well revenged, that I trow, and fare ye well, good palmer.' No sooner was he gone than the gates were opened, and out Will was marched between his guards. He looked around, and seeing no succour he said to the sheriff: 'If I needs must die, grant me one boon.' 'And what may that be?'

said the sheriff. 'My master never yet had a man of his hanged. Prithee give me a sword and let me fight for my life with all of ye till I fall dead on the ground.' But the sheriff swore he should hang. 'Unbind me then,' says Will. 'Never a wit,' says the sheriff, 'thou shalt hang bound, and so will thy master when I shall catch him.' Then up spake Will and called him dastard coward, and said that Robin would come and take payment for that day's work. He called them all fools as he was marched to the gallows. But when he was come there out I leap from a bush and come to him. 'Before thou diest,' I said, 'take leave of thy dear friends, Will.' The sheriff he bawled out, 'Who is that varlet? Some rebel I trow. Hold him, ye there!' But in a twinkling I had cut Will's bonds and twitched a sword out of the hands of one of the sheriff's men and stuck it into Will's. 'Lay about with this till help comes, Will,' I said. So we stood back to back and laid about us, and then up comes Robin with his archers. The sheriff he ran when the arrows began to fly, and all the men learned his lesson and ran too. 'Oh, stay a moment,' says Will, 'take leave before you go. You'll never catch Robin Hood if you run away from him.' 'Oh! ill-betide you,' shouted Robin also, 'here's my sword yet in its scabbard and the work all done!' So we took poor Will away. 'I bethought me I should see Little John's face or my master's this day,' he told us."

"That was a noble piece of work," said the knight. "By my troth, I could listen to thee all night, good Little John."

"And I could talk all night of our band and then have plenty to say in the morning."

In this way they went on their road till York was reached in the evening. Then the knight took leave of his great and kindly squire with more assurances of returning that day twelvemonth to the trysting tree. Sir Richard soon found lodging, and in the morning he arrayed himself in those sad and threadbare garments which he had brought with him, and betook himself to the abbey.



The Knight redeems his lands.

III

AT ST. MARY'S ABBEY

THE abbot sat feasting with the prior and monks, and well he knew that it was the day on which the knight must pay his loan or lose his lands. He spoke to them all and reminded them: "This day twelvemonth, as ye will remember, Sir Richard-at-the-Lee came here and borrowed four hundred pounds. If he cometh not this day to repay it, his lands which we hold in fee will be forfeited and he will be disherited." The sheriff and the Lord High Justice of England, who were there also, nodded approval.

"'Tis full early yet," said the prior turning to the abbot. "The day has not gone far. 'Twould be pity indeed for the knight to lose all by the fate of an hour or so. I would rather pay a hundred pound at once than such a grievous thing should happen. Perchance he is in another land; but his rights are in England, nevertheless. Or perhaps he suffereth from cold and hunger and sorry nights in the open. Ye will not have such easy consciences as to do him wrong."

"By heaven and St. Richard," roared the abbot, "dost thou fly in my beard now, as always!"

With that there entered the high-cellarer, a zany of a monk with a large head. He was mightily pleased to hear that the abbey was in the way to be richer in one day by so much land. "By our Lord I will swear," he said, "that the knight is either dead or hanged, and we shall

have in this place another four hundred pounds every year to spend."

The abbot had already paid for the help of the Lord High Justice of England to make this affair a sure gain for the abbey, and it was given out that for certain if the knight came not that day his lands would be forfeited. "I dare undertake," said the Lord Justice, "he will not come to-day, or if he do 'twill be too late." But at that moment Sir Richard was at the gate.

"Welcome, sir knight," said the porter, who knew him again and swore that so good a horse for a courser he had never seen as the knight's, and was for taking it to the stable.

"Stable of thine no steed of mine shall hold," replied the knight. Then into the hall he stepped and on his knee greeted all the assembly.

"By favour, sir abbot," he said, "I come to hold my day——"

"Hast thou brought the money?" cried the abbot breaking in.

"I have not, not one penny."

"The more luckless debtor thou. Drink to me, sir justice." Then turning again to the knight: "What dost thou then here, since thou hast not brought the wherewithal to redeem thy pledge?"

"But to beg for a day longer, for God's dear sake."

Then the justice spoke: "The day is broken now. Thou art too late to get thy lands."

"Now, good sir justice, be my friend and help me against my foes."

"That I cannot, for I am beholden to the abbot by his fees to me."

So the knight turned to the sheriff. "Good sir sheriff, be my friend ;" but the sheriff said him nay.

"Now, good sir abbot, be my friend, of thy courtesy, and hold my lands till I can redeem them, and I will truly be thy servant until thou hast my four hundred pounds."

Then the abbot swore a great oath and said, "Get the land where thou mayst, for thou'lt get none of me."

"By heaven," quoth Sir Richard, "my land will cost me dear ere I have it again ; but it is good for a man to see who are his friends before need cometh to him."

At this the abbot scowled and hurled many a bad name at the knight. "Out, out of my hall, base, false knight !" he cried.

"Thou liest, proud abbot ! False I never was," and here Sir Richard rose. "It is the most uncourteous pride in you to suffer a knight so long to kneel. I have been in many a joust and tournament and faced death and danger, and can prove my worth at any time."

Then the justice, thinking perchance to make even a better bargain, asked, "How much more will ye give, sir abbot, for the knight to release you of his pledge ; for otherwise I see well that ye will never hold his land in peace."

"One hundred pound more I will give," said the abbot.

"Give him two," said the justice.

"Nay, by heaven !" said the knight, "ye shall not get it so. Though ye offer a thousand more ye would be none the nearer. Abbot, justice, or friar shall never be heir of mine." Then he strode up to a table, and taking out his bag of money, emptied it all out. "Have here thy gold, sir abbot, which thou lentest me. Hadst thou shown me any courtesy this day I would have rewarded thee."

The abbot sat still and could eat no more. His head dropped to his shoulder as he stared at the money. "Take thy gold back again," he cried. "Sir justice, give back my fee."

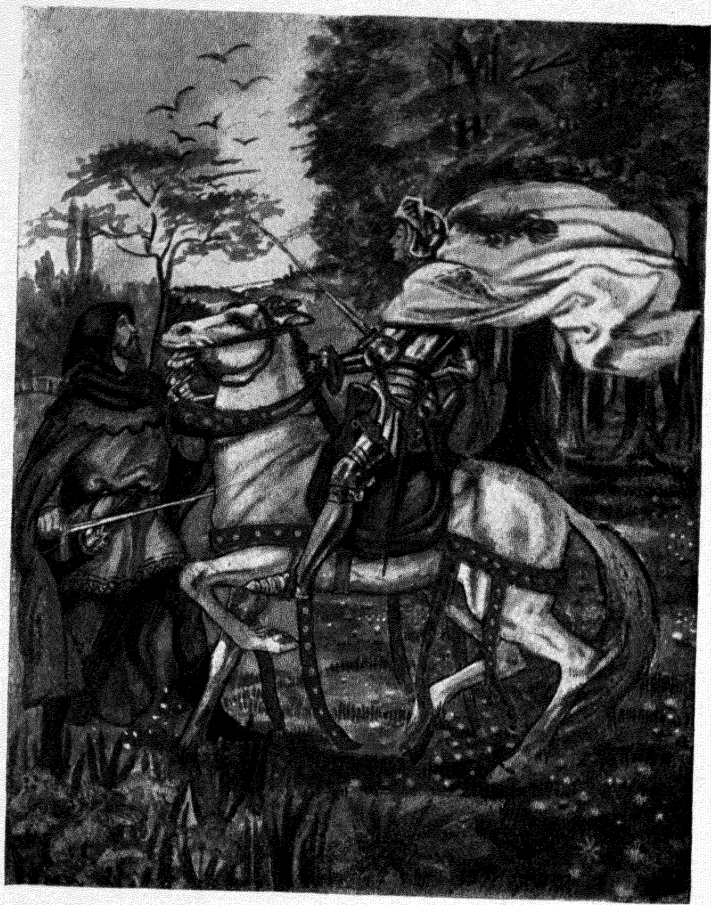
"Never a penny," answered the justice.

Then forth stood the knight and spoke boldly, "Sir abbot and ye men of law, mark that I have this day kept the bond required of me, and I will have my land again in spite of all ye can do or say." Then he stalked to the door, and when he was without he put his gay clothing on again and was blithe and merry. Mounting his horse with a song on his lips he rode to his home in Utersdale, and on the way his wife met him. She had come out to cheer him on his way back, expecting to see him cast down and sorrowful for the loss of his lands which she knew he had not the money to redeem. When she saw him all tricked out so gaily, and heard his joyful singing, she doubted what to make of it.

"Welcome, my lord," she said. "Is everything lost?"

"Be merry, dear lady, and pray for Robin Hood! For he hath helped me out of my woe. But for his kindness thou and I would be beggars still. The abbot is paid, with money which the good yeoman lent me as I came through the wood."

Great were the rejoicings in the home of the knight. He dwelt long at home, until, at the end of a year, he had come by four hundred pounds. But during that time many other things occurred in the greenwood which must be told.



Robin Hood recognises Maid Marian.

IV

MAID MARIAN

WE have seen how courteous Robin Hood was upon all occasions, in spite of the fact that his mode of life necessitated an aggressive approach to all from whom he won the means of subsistence. The reason of his charm of manner was doubtless that he came of a good family and was, therefore, well-bred. It is thought that his real name was Robert Fitzooth, which people who could neither read nor write soon turned into Robin Hood. Men say that he was a nobleman and that his title was Earl of Huntingdon. We learn that, being of a very generous disposition, he spent and gave away more than he ought to have done. This caused him to get into debt and, naturally, into trouble. So many bills were brought against him that he could not pay even a small part of them. In despair he took no notice of any of them, and of course he had to be punished for that, so consequently he was outlawed. To be an outlaw is to be denied all the protection the law gives. In the old days anybody might do any sort of harm to an outlaw, and the victim could get no redress. One might even kill an outlaw and go unpunished.

When Robin Hood found himself in this dreadful condition he resolved to have nothing more to do with the world, but to go into the woods and live as best he could. And all this came of his being generous when he could not afford to be.

He got together a few friends who were in a condition similar to his own, and they all went into the forests, sometimes in Nottinghamshire and sometimes in Yorkshire, where they lived by killing the king's deer and by plundering anybody who could afford to lose his goods and money and not suffer much thereby. People in want they never robbed ; nor women either, as you have heard.

Robin Hood and his companions were probably Saxons and hated the Normans, who when they first came into the country had made a lot of harsh and cruel laws which bore very hard upon the people.

Before Robin was so unfortunate as to be outlawed, and when he lived in his father's house with all the luxury of a nobleman, he had met a lady who was, so they say, very beautiful ; and I think she must have been very strong and manly too, if what we read of her is true. Her name was Marian ; but I cannot find much about her in the old books. No doubt Robin was fond of the ladies—who is not that has a free and happy temperament ? It is more than likely that a lot of men living in a wood with nothing to amuse themselves with except shooting arrows would long sometimes for the companionship of other and gentler people than themselves. And, no doubt, sweethearts and wives were often among them. The old Morris dances, in which various characters were represented, usually included dancers dressed up like Robin Hood, Little John, and Maid Marian. These dances were favourites for centuries after Robin Hood was dead. It was evidently necessary to have a woman in the case, and that is probably why Maid Marian is always associated with Robin Hood, although the oldest ballads from which we get all our tales of the man say nothing at all about the woman.

A more modern ballad tells us that this Maid Marian

loved Robin very much. She was of noble family also, and so beautiful that she even excelled Helen of Troy. When Robin went away to the forest poor Marian was very grieved and sorrowful. She wanted him back so much that she tried to plan ways whereby she could see him again. But as he would not come to her, she resolved to go to him, and this is how she managed it. Thinking better to escape hindrance and molestation if she were dressed as a man, she got some armour and buckled it all on, and then nobody could tell her from a man. Next she took a bow and arrows, a sword, and a buckler or shield, got on horseback, and rode away to the woods to find her dear Robin.

But it often happened that Robin himself had need to disguise himself also when he went into the towns, otherwise people would have killed him or taken him prisoner, for there was a price upon his head. And one morning when he was riding toward the town, disguised as a knight, he met another knight coming towards him. In those days, when knights met they used not to say, "How do you do?" to each other, they simply used to rush at each other like a couple of quarrelsome dogs; only they were very polite to each other afterwards, when the damage was done. So this knight, when he saw Robin coming, stood stock still, waiting for battle as Robin thought. Therefore Robin came up to him on the offensive, expecting himself to be attacked. Thus they came to blows in the customary manner. They slashed at each other with their swords until Robin got a nasty cut on his face and the knight was wounded rather badly in the side. At this Robin cried, "Hold thy hand, sir knight. Thou art bold and valiant."

At the sound of the voice a shriek came from the knight,

who undid his helmet and showed the face of Maid Marian, all pale with weariness and the wound she had received.

“Robin, O Robin !” she cried, and they fell into each others arms with tears and kisses.

Robin gave up his journey into the town and led Marian back to the tree. Little John was called and at once went to kill a deer for a feast. They made merry and the wine flowed from great flagons. All the yeomen drank again and again to Maid Marian.

Whether she stayed there with Robin for long I cannot discover. Perhaps she never went at all. The little tale has not the ring of truth about it ; but that Robin Hood actually lived and probably did most of the things told of him there is very little doubt.

V

THE TINKER

IN his wanderings near to the town Robin Hood happened to meet with a travelling tinker. Seeing the man to be a lusty sort of blade, and one probably fit as a recruit to his band, the outlaw bade him "Good morrow" and fell a chatting.

"I hear sad news abroad," he said. "I fear all is not well. Knowst thou aught?"

"What is that news? Tell me at once, for I live at Banbury, and am a tinker by trade, and do not hear much how the world wags."

"Why, as for the news, I speak but as I hear; but 'tis said two tinkers were set in the stocks for drinking ale."

"If that be all, even if thy news be true, I think it not worth a hiccup. I warrant me thou wouldst not give up thy drinking of ale and beer for threat of the stocks."

"No, i'faith! I love it too well. Well, if thou valuest not my news what news hast thou? Thou goest from town to town and must needs gather much gossip."

"All the news I have is that it is worth any one's while to capture a bold outlaw they call Robin Hood. As for me, I have a king's warrant to take him where I can. Canst thou tell me where to put hand upon him? An thou canst do this I'll make a man of thee. The king will give one hundred pounds to see him. So it will serve us both well enow if we can but get him."

"Prithee let me see the warrant," said Robin, "I can

tell if it be all in order, and if it is right as thou sayest I will do the best I can for to take him this very night."

"That will I not! I trust it with none but myself. And if thou wilt not tell me where he is, I must needs go alone and take him by force as best I can."

Robin considered and thought of a plan whereby he might make one warrant less of those out against him. "We shall find him at Nottingham if thou wilt go there."

The tinker agreeing, they set off together and stopped at an inn, the landlord of which knew Robin well and was friendly disposed to him. There they called for ale and wine, feasted and made merry: too merry for the tinker's welfare, for the wine muddled his wits and he fell into a deep sleep. Seeing that he was in a fit state to be left Robin bade good-night to the landlord and left the tinker to recover, to find the bill at his elbow, but miss the warrant from his wallet.

In due time he awoke, and seeing himself alone, called lustily to the landlord and raised a great tale of woe. "I had a warrant from the king which might have been the making of my fortune, for it was to take Robin Hood the outlaw. But it is gone and my money too, and I have nothing to pay with, and the man here who I thought was my friend has gone away."

"That friend you tell on," said the host with many a chuckle, "was Robin Hood himself, and when he first met you he meant you little good."

The tinker raged and foamed. "Had I but known it had been he when that I had him here, one of us would have proved his right and might. But I will abide here no longer. I will go seek him, and whatever betide me I will find him out. But one thing I would gladly know: What have I to pay thee?"

"Just ten shillings," answered the host.

"Take thou here my working-bag and my hammer, and if I but light upon that knave I will soon redeem them."

"The only way thou canst do that is to seek him in the king's parks where he will be killing the deer."

On hearing this the tinker set out in furious determination to find Robin and come to blows with him, and he twirled his stout crab-tree cudgel in threatening promise.

So it happened that whilst Robin was hunting in the morning he was aware of somebody stealing up to him. "What knave is that," he asked, "that cometh so near?"

"No knave, no knave, as you shall soon know," answered the tinker coming up. "Which of us is in the wrong my crab-tree cudgel will soon settle."

Then Robin had to give over the chase and turn to this assailant. He drew his sword and parried the tinker's blows as well as he could; but the furious man laid about him with such a will that Robin's head soon began to reel. The forester grew angry and beset the tinker hard enough to give him thoughts of taking to his heels. But they rested soon and then went at it again, when the tinker got in so many blows and defended himself so well that Robin's bones ached like torture, and he was forced to cry, "A boon! A boon!"

"Before I grant thee any boon I'll hang thee on this tree," and then as the tinker looked about him for a moment Robin whipped his horn to his mouth and blew a blast. His adversary was astonished at this and lowered his staff, whilst Robin sat down on a bank. So they both rested willingly enough, and after a little while were aware of two men who broke through the bushes and stepped upon the scene.

"What is the matter, master, that you sit panting on the highway side?" asked Little John, whilst Scathelock, the other new-comer, measured himself against the tinker.

"This man is a tinker," answered Robin, "who stands here by, and he hath well tinkered my sides, Little John."

"Then I pray that tinker that he will let me see what I can pay if he will do the same tinkering for me."

"Nay, nay!" said Robin. "Let it be as it is. If the tinker will come and live with me he shall have twenty pounds a year as long as he doth live. He is a well-mettled man by nature and a metal-man by trade. I never thought that any could have made me cry so loud. If he will be one of us he shall have his proper share with all of us, and we will burn his warrant under the venison."

The tinker laughingly fell in with the plan, shook hands all round, and swore to be a valiant and staunch supporter of the band.



VI

THE MONK

It befell early one morning in May, upon a Whitsuntide, when the sun rose brilliantly and the birds were singing merrily, that Little John awoke and lay looking up into the trees above him whilst listening to the blackbirds and thrushes that seemed to be on every tree around him. The gigantic man stretched his limbs and felt glad—glad in his health and strength ; glad in his freedom from care ; glad above all things that he had cast his lot amidst such peaceful and beautiful surroundings. Little John was, perhaps, not given to moralising ; that was not the order of the day in his times and with such a calling as his. But this particular morning had its effect upon his mind though he knew it not, and, feeling glad, he burst out with expressions of satisfaction, crying, " This is a merry morning, by Heaven, and a merrier man than I am this morning lives not in Christendom."

It happened that Robin Hood was close by. He too had awakened, but had not risen. His thoughts took a less physical turn than Little John's. His finer intelligence was guided by the beauty of the Whitsun morning to the Providence who caused it all. He felt devout and solemnly grateful rather than merry.

"Pluck up thy heart, my dear master," cried Little John, "and think on this full, fair May morning."

"One thing grieves me," answered Robin, "and causes my heart much woe. It is that on this solemn day I may go neither to mass nor to matins. It is now a fortnight and more since I went to worship." On a sudden he made a resolve: "To-day I will to Nottingham, and by the help of Mary mild I will show my face in the church, sheriff or no sheriff."

Then up spake Little Mutch, "Take but a dozen of thy stout yeomen, master, and let them be well weaponed, and thou wilt come to no hurt. Where one may be slain a dozen will stand."

"Nay, by my faith, I will have none of the men; but Little John shall go and bear my bow till time comes for me to use it."

Little John was in no mood for such decorous and tame behaviour. He resented following his master like a mere lackey. "Thou shalt bear thine own bow, master," he said, "and I will bear mine, and as we go we will shoot for pennies under the limes."

Robin gazed at his henchman with much amusement, and his heartiness began to have the upper hand again. "I will not shoot for pennies, John; but I will lay three for every one thou layest."

Nothing loth the other agreed, and when they had breakfasted and made themselves ready they left the com-

pany and set off on their pilgrimage with their wagering to beguile the journey. After some time Little John reckoned that he had won five shillings from his master. This Robin doubted. They disputed. Worse than that these two firm friends, who loved each other quite well enough to risk life one for the other, came to words about their wretched wagers. Where were now all the elevating thoughts with which the beauty of the morning had filled them? Robin answered shortly that he was not five shillings to the bad, and when altercation grew hotter and fiercer he told Little John that he lied and smote him with his hand. At this Little John waxed wroth. What he could have taken from a lesser man it hurt his pride to take from his hero, so losing control of his temper he drew his sword.

"Wert thou not my master," he cried, "this should smite thee full sore." But here he recovered himself, and dashing the blade back into its scabbard said, "Get thee a man where thou wilt, Robin, for thou'lt get me no more." Then turning upon his heel he went off in the direction of Sherwood.

As for Robin he stood there looking after the retreating figure of his dear companion, who never looked round, but disappeared in the tall bracken. Remorse and despair filled Robin's heart; yet was he too proud to call or blow his horn, though had he done so Little John would have been back again and these two doughty men would have run to each other's arms like schoolgirls. He turned sadly and walked on to Nottingham.

When he went into St. Mary's church he offered thanks that he had got there without hindrance and prayed that he might come safely out again. Kneeling down before the rood he was known for Robin Hood by everybody

who was in the church. A heavily cowed monk stole up cautiously, peeped into his face, and then ran out at the door. He told all the warders to shut and bar the town gates, then ran to the sheriff. "Arise, sir sheriff," he cried, "make thee ready and come forth, for I have espied the felon of the king's deer. He is in the town forsooth. I saw him as he stood at mass. This traitor's name is Robin Hood. He lives in the woods under the trees. He robbed me of a hundred pounds, therefore I know him well, for he is never out of my mind."

The sheriff was in a great bustle; called his men and hurried off to the church. In at the doors they rushed with staves in their hands, and when Robin saw this posse coming upon him he muttered, "Alas! alas! Now do I miss my Little John." He took out a two-handed sword and began to lay about him, striking always where the crowd was thickest. It was a terrible fight for dear life, and twelve men were soon lying dead upon the floor. The sheriff would certainly have been one of them if fortune had not favoured him, for making a stroke upon that worthy's head Robin's sword broke off short. "May God work woe to the smith that made thee," cried the outlaw as he flung the hilt amongst his assailants, "for now am I weaponless, alas! and unless I can fly from these traitors I wot well they will kill me."

But now that he was without a weapon they boldly pressed upon him and soon bound his hands and led him away to the gaol.

A few moments after who should come rushing into the church, followed by two or three score of archers, but Little John himself. Faithful and forgiving, he had returned to the camp, called some men, and hastened to Nottingham to look after his chief. He had managed to pass the

gates just before the monk had besought the porters to shut them. Quickly gaining tidings and surmising what he failed to learn, he concluded that Robin Hood was discovered, and therefore ran with his men to the church with all speed. Once within they scurried hither and thither, searching crypt and turrets, but no trace of their beloved captain could they see. This threw many of them into great consternation and sorrow. One or two lay down overcome with despair, partly for grief of their chief and partly for the knowledge that if he were taken and killed the whole company would doubtless be captured and hanged ; or, at any rate, if they escaped death there would be an end to the free, happy, and well-organised life in the greenwood.

But Little John kept his head. He rated them for being so easily afear'd. " Our master," he explained, " hath been hard bestood ; but yet hath perchance 'scaped away. Pluck up your hearts and leave this moaning and hearken to what I shall say ; he has served Our Lady many a day in time agone, and will yet serve her securely enough. I trust to her specially that he shall die no wicked death. Therefore be ye cheered. With the help of Mary mild I shall yet be avenged of this monk who hath betrayed our Robin. Mutch and I will stay here to find him. Go ye meanwhile back to the trysting tree and keep it well, and spare ye none of venison or game."

The house of Mutch's father, the miller, was quite near upon the high road, and there the two foresters retired and kept watch upon all who passed.

As Little John stood at a window the next morning he was aware of a monk that came riding by, with a little page at his side.

" By my faith, Mutch, here are some tidings for thee.

See'st thou that monk ? I know him by his wide hood." Without loss of a moment the two yeomen ran down into the highway, and presenting themselves as courteous and gentle bodies they accosted and asked tidings of the monk in the most friendly manner.

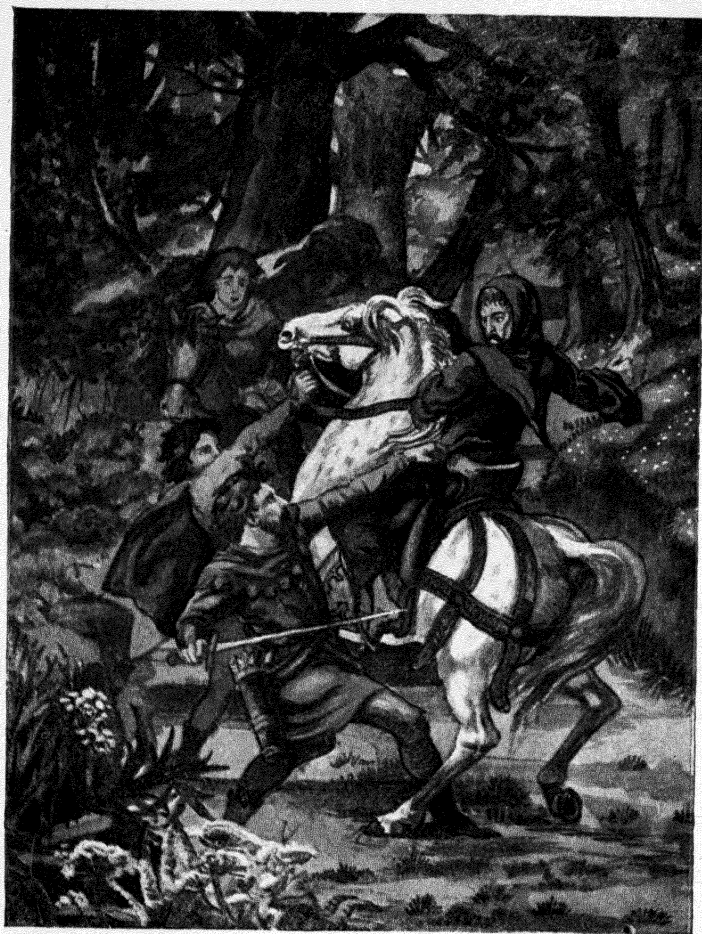
"Dost know aught of a false outlaw who was taken yesterday ? He was called Robin Hood. He robbed me and my fellows of twenty shillings. If he be forsooth taken we shall be right glad."

The monk rose to the bait with eagerness. "He robbed ye, did he ? So he did me, of a hundred pound and more. But certainly he is taken, and that by me. I first laid hand upon him. Ye may thank me therefore." The monk further explained that he was even then journeying to the king with letters relating to the capture of the outlaw.

"I pray God may thank thee, and we will too, when we may. An ye will have us, we will go with thee a little and bring thee upon thy way ; for this Robin hath many a wild fellow lurking in these parts ; that I tell thee for certain. If they knew that thou didst ride this way, thou wouldst be slain, i'faith !"

The monk accepting the escort, they went along talking until a safe distance from the town had been reached. Presently Little John made a sudden grab at the horse's head, and at the same moment Mutch seized the page's horse. Before the monk could do anything to defend himself, Little John had him by the collar of his hood and wrenched him out of the saddle. Nor did he show him any mercy, for he let him come upon his head.

All the pent-up fury of the outlaw's revenge for the betrayal of his master now broke out, unhindered by any shams of manner. Out ripped his sword and the monk



Death of the Monk.

delayed a blow from it only by a moment as he cried for mercy.

"He was my dearly loved master," said Little John, "whom thou hast brought to this sorrow. But thou shalt never come at our king with thy tales." So saying Little John swung his sword and the monk's head rolled upon the ground. At this, Mutch likewise killed the page, thinking that it were better to make sure of the business and leave no one to tell. They buried the bodies after having taken from the monk's wallet the letters that were for the king.

With all speed they mounted the horses of their victims and came to London, where they were presented to his majesty. John dropped upon his knee saying, "God save thee, my liege lord," and the king returned the greeting. Then the forester spoke up boldly and handed him the letters.

When the king had read them he exclaimed, "As I hope to thrive, there was never a man in the whole of merry England that I so longed to see as this famous outlaw. Where is the monk that should have brought these letters?"

"By my truth, my liege, he died on the way."

This seemed to satisfy his majesty, who asked no more awkward questions, but gave both the men twenty pounds and made them yeomen of the crown into the bargain. To Little John he gave his seal as authority to the sheriff to bring Robin Hood to him.

When the yeomen were dismissed they lost no time in making their way back to Nottingham, and were much surprised, upon arriving there, to find the gates still shut. Little John called up the porter and asked him the cause of this unusual thing, who replied, "It is because Robin

Hood has been taken, and though he now lieth in prison, yet were the town a better prison still with its gates barred ; for I tell thee sooth, three of his men, one John, and one Mutch, and another Scathelock have slain many of our men, and every day our lives are in danger." The porter then admitted them, and Little John spurred to the sheriff's, where he produced the king's privy seal and gave it into the sheriff's hand, delivering the king's demands.

The great man was dumbfounded and doffed his hood. "Where is the monk that bare the letters ?" he asked.

"Why," answered Little John, "the king hath taken such a liking to him that he hath made him Abbot of Westminster."

So then was Little John and Mutch also made a deal of, the best wine and plenty of good cheer being placed before them, and good lodging was found for them for the night.

But when everybody was fast asleep in the night, and the sheriff was drunk with his wine and ale, the two foresters arose and crept away to the gaol. There they made a great pother, calling up the gaoler and crying that Robin Hood had broken from prison and was gone free.

The porter roused and got to his feet ; but so soon as he came out, Little John was ready for him with a drawn sword and forced him against the wall.

"Now will I be porter," quoth John, taking the keys from the gaoler's girdle whilst Mutch held him down. Then giving him something to keep him still the two ran to the cell and let Robin loose. There was just time for one hearty hand grip between the chief and his men, and then Robin took a sword that Little John had brought for him, and the three sallied out quietly into the streets, rushed to the walls, which they climbed at the lowest part, leaped down, and were off to their greenwood home.

At dawn, when the cock began to crow, the sheriff had news brought to him that the gaoler was dead. Cursing his fate and the outlaws also, he ordered the bell to be rung and sent the crier through the town announcing that whoever could bring him Robin Hood, be he yeoman or serving man, should have handsome reward.

The poor sheriff assured himself that he dare never come before the king after having allowed the outlaw to escape. "Forsooth he will hang me," he said. He had Nottingham searched to its uttermost corner, and all the while there was Robin as free as the leaves on the trees.

On the way back Little John, still thinking of the quarrel between himself and his master, had difficulty to keep himself from speaking of it, and whilst they were talking over the events of the past days, he turned to Robin and said quietly, "I have done thee a good turn for an evil one. Requite me when thou mayst. I have done thee a good turn, forsooth. I have brought thee back to the lime trees and oaks, to the birds and the sunshine, from prison and certain death. Now fare thee well!"

"Nay, by my truth," replied Robin, "thou shalt never leave me. Thou art the better man. I will make thee master; master of me and of my men."

"Nay, then, that will never be, either, and since thou wouldst have me with thee still, then I will fain be a fellow, and no other."

So these two were now fast in friendship for a lifetime. As the three men drew near to their haunts they were soon espied by the company, and right glad were the men to see all three whole and sound and back again. With great feasting and much wine did this happy day end under the great tree, and blacker than ever were the vows made against the sheriff of Nottingham.

In due time the king heard of the daring escape of the outlaw from prison and very wroth he was, particularly as he wished to come at the bold ranger himself. He saw, further, that Little John was the hero of this affair, and had beguiled him and the sheriff too. No man likes to feel that he has been fooled, and a king is likely to be more angry than any at being tricked.

"That varlet Little John, as he is called, hath beguiled me, that's certain, and hath beguiled the sheriff too, and but for that I would certainly hang that fat fool who cannot keep a prisoner under lock and key. And to think that I made those knaves yeomen of the crown, and fee'd them with mine own hand, and all the time they were dissembling. 'Tis certain there are not three other such rogues in all England, nor so cunning. This Little John is true to his master. By St. John I swear he loves his outlaw master better than he does his king. In street and stall Robin Hood is ever bond to him."

When some of his courtiers would have enlarged upon the event by way of pacification and condolence, the king said sharply, "Speak no more of the matter. Little John has beguiled us all, and that is the end of it."



VII

FRIAR TUCK, THE CURTALL FRIAR

ON a day in the greenest month of summer, shortly after Robin Hood had been rescued from Nottingham gaol, the outlaws, having no fighting affairs on hand, and forgetting for the time their forays for gold, were disposed to be merry in a harmless way. They ran races, and leaped, and vied amongst themselves in other physical sports. After a little they came to their usual and favourite exercise of shooting with the long bow. They discussed as to who could kill hart, buck, or doe at five hundred feet distance, and after many trials it was proved that to the three heroes of the company, Robin's most trusted men, the task offered no difficulty, for Scathelock killed a buck, Mutch, he killed a doe, and Little John brought down what is named as a hart of Greece. What that description implies I cannot say; but it is supposed to be a fanciful way of saying a fat hart; that is, a hart of *grease*. All these shots were at the prescribed distance of five hundred feet.

The captain was so delighted at this show of prowess that he broke forth into exclamations of praise and

delight. "God's blessing on thy hearts," he said, "that have shown me such shots. I would ride my horse a hundred miles to find a man that could match ye."

That caused Will Scathelock to laugh. "There lives a curtall friar in Fountains Abbey, master, that will beat us all at this game, and yourself too."

This was difficult for Robin to believe, but on further assurance from Little John he swore that he would neither eat nor drink till he had seen this wondrous friar. Therefore he rose at dawn the next day, clad himself in a stout buff jerkin which he wore under his mantle, and put a steel cap on his head. Thus arrayed he looked every inch a nobleman. Then taking his broadsword and buckler, and his bow and a sheaf of arrows as a matter of course, he set out.

After a long ride with his company following, scattered and hidden in the undergrowth in their usual manner, he came to Fountains Dale, where the water ran through the valley. There he dismounted and tied his horse to a tree. Very shortly, as luck would have it, he descried a big man, attired more like a soldier than a friar, coming along by the water's edge.

"Art thou the curtall friar?" he asked.

"I am," the man replied.

"Then, I prithee, carry me over the water."

"And if I will not?"

"Then we will fight for it."

To this the monk made no answer, but took Robin upon his back, wading through the deep water until he came to the opposite bank, where the outlaw chief leapt to the ground.

Then the friar spoke. "Carry me back again over this water, my fine fellow. or it shall breed trouble for thee."

The forester took the friar on his back and waded back again without either a good word or a bad on either side. Lightly the friar leapt off when they had reached the bank, and once more Robin said, "Carry me over this water, thou curtall knight, or it shall breed thee pain."

Once again the friar took up the forester and stepped into the stream which came up to his knee, but was much deeper at the middle. There he stopped short. Then with a lurch he tossed Robin into the water, saying, "Choose thee, my fine fellow, whether thou wilt sink or swim."

The victim chose to swim or scramble to a bush of broom, whilst the friar strode to some withies. Each stood grinning at the other till both made for the shore.

As soon as Robin Hood could manage it, he fixed an arrow to his bow and let fly at the friar, who, quite ready for it, turned it aside with his buckler, shouting, "Shoot on, shoot on, my fine fellow, and keep shooting as thou hast begun. If thou shootest here a whole summer's day, I will not budge."

The forester continued to shoot until all his arrows were spent, but he could not hurt the curtall friar. So he drew near to him with his sword drawn and his buckler advanced. The other seeing this, did the same, and there they fought with might and main, from ten o'clock until four of the afternoon. In the end the stature and weight of the friar told in his favour, and Robin was compelled to drop upon his knee and beg a boon of his antagonist.

"Give me leave to set my horn to my mouth and to blow three blasts."

"That will I do," answered the monk, "and I hope thou mayst blow so well that both thine eyes fall out."

Robin raised his horn and blew three times, and in a very few moments fifty men came scurrying over the leas to where he stood.

The friar was dumbfounded. "What men are these ?" he asked, "that come so hastily ?"

"These men are mine, friar ; but what is that to thee ?"

"A boon, a boon," cried the monk ; "such a one as I granted thee. Give me leave to put my fist to my mouth and to whute three whues."

"I were much to blame if I denied thee that ; and it would gladden me right well to hear three whues from a friar's fist."

So the monk put his fist to his mouth and whuted—that is to say, whistled, and in a few minutes fifty curtall dogs came running over the lea to him. It was from the fact that this monk kept many curtall dogs, or curs, as we call them in these days, that he was known as the curtall friar.

"Now," he cried to Robin, "here be a dog of mine for every man of thine, and I myself for thee."

"Nay, by my faith, friar, that may not be."

But whilst Robin was protesting one cur leaped upon him from the front and another attacked him from behind. They tore his mantle from off his back, whilst others ran and retrieved the arrows and kept them in their mouths, as they had been trained to do.

The first man of the company to run in to his captain's aid was Little John. "Take up thy dogs, friar," he shouted.

"Whose man art thou that comest here to prate to me ?"

"I am Little John, if ye would know, Robin Hood's

man, and I tell thee without lying that if thou dost not soon take up thy dogs, I will, and thee with them." Saying this, he bent his bow and began to shoot at the dogs as quickly as he could, and before many minutes had passed ten of them lay dead.

"Hold, hold thy hand, good fellow," cried the monk, who did not like to see this wholesale slaughter. "Thy master and I will agree well enough." And at this a truce was called and a parley held.

"If," said Robin, "thou wilt forsake this fair dale and Fountains Abbey too, I will give thee seven shillings every Sunday throughout the year, and at every holiday thou shalt have a new change of garment, if thou wilt come with me to Nottingham and remain with me."

The friar was quite won over by such an offer and gave his hand in treaty. Never before had any man, neither knight, earl, nor lord, been able to make the curtall friar yield. He had kept Fountains Dale to himself for seven years in unquestioned supremacy.

This man, being a monk, was of great service to Robin Hood. It is said that he officiated as the chief's chaplain. In an old play this curtall friar is identified with Friar Tuck. In the morris dances Friar Tuck was a character as indispensable as was Maid Marian.

VIII

THE POTTER

ONE day news was brought to Robin Hood by one of his scouts that a potter with a cart well laden with his wares was driving through the wood.

"I know him," quoth Robin. "He hath long haunted these ways, but he hath never yet paid one penny of toll."

Said Little John, "I met him once at Wentbridge, and he gave me three strokes that my sides can feel to this day; so, good master, have a care how you handle him lest evil come of it. I will lay forty shillings that there is no man among us who could make him lay down a penny."

"Here," said Robin Hood, "is forty shillings, and I will make it more if it please thee, and I wager I shall make that proud potter render toll."

So saying he went out to meet the victim, and when he had come up to him, started out in front of his horse, laying a hand upon the bridle.

"What is thy will, fellow?" asked the potter.

"All these three years and more, Master Potter, thou hast ridden to and fro this way, yet wert thou ne'er so courteous as to offer one penny of toll."

"And who art thou that asketh toll of me?"

"Robin Hood is my name, and I have wagered that thou shalt leave something in pledge with me."

"Pledge I will leave thee none, nor pay toll either.

Take thy hand from my horse, else, by my faith, thou shalt suffer for it." Thereupon he reached back into his cart and fetched out a good staff; then leaped down to where Robin stood, crying, "Fellow, let my horse go."

Robin out with his sword and the two began to exchange slashes and knocks. The foresters were all looking on from under a tree. "Yonder potter is a stout rogue," said Little John, "and will stand to it stiffly. Our master hath his work to do." And, indeed, at this moment the potter fetched a back-hand stroke that twitted the buckler off from Robin's hand. Stooping to get possession of it again he received another blow from the potter's bludgeon that felled him to the ground. When the men saw the bad case of their chief they were afraid the potter would slay him outright. So Little John ran up followed by the others, and as he succoured his master he asked him who had won the wager.

"Am I to have your forty shillings, or art thou to have mine?"

"If they were an hundred," responded Robin faintly, "by my faith, they be all thine."

Then said the potter, "I have heard wise men say it is full little courtesy to stop a poor yeoman of his journey if he come driving along the way."

"By my truth, thou sayst right," answered Robin. "Thou speakest good yeomanry. Thou shalt drive forth every day and shall never be stayed by me."

This ended the matter as far as blows went, and as Robin turned to take his way back to the lodge with his men, one of those pranks came into his mind of which he was so fond. "I pray thee, good potter," he said, "wilt thou have a fellowship with me? Wilt thou give me thy clothing and take mine?"

"I'faith, I agree. Thou shalt find me good fellow enough for that."

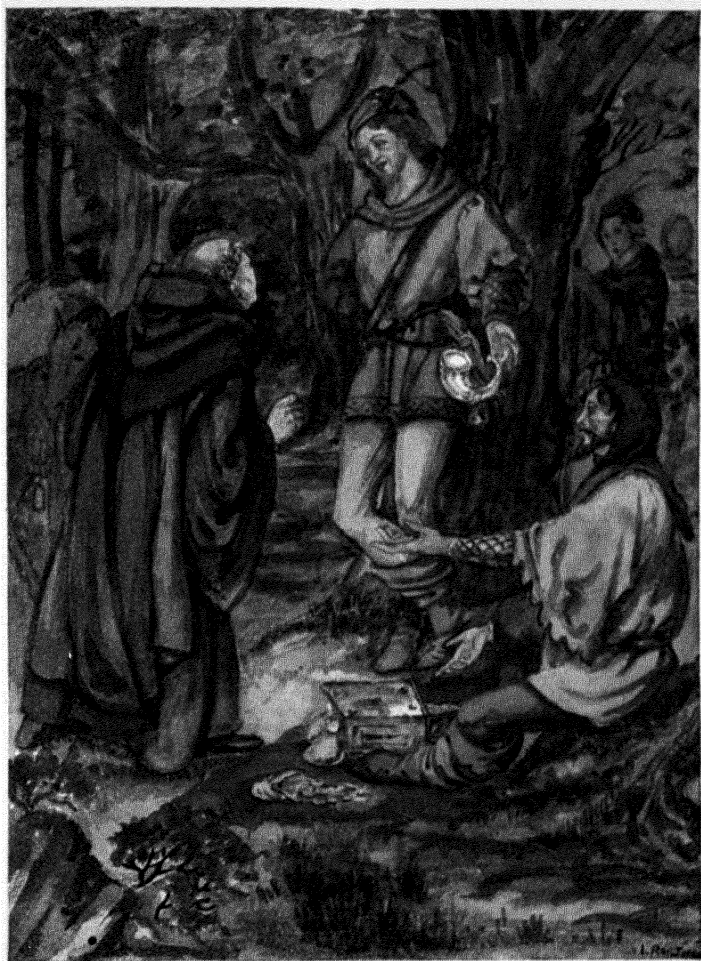
"Then I will go to Nottingham and sell thy pots."

"If thou dost thou must sell them well, or come back with them as thou didst go."

"Nay, by my truth, beshrew my head if I come back with any an I can find a good wife will buy them cheap."

To go to Nottingham was, for Robin Hood, to put his head into the lion's mouth; but he thought he might play some trick off upon the sheriff very well if he were disguised as a potter. His men were not at all easy about it, nevertheless, and Little John bade him be well aware of the sheriff of Nottingham, who was little friendly to the foresters. But Robin made light of all their warnings, and started off arrayed in the potter's clothes and driving his cart. The potter himself stayed with the outlaws and fed well with them and made merry, with never a fear of his own welfare.

When Robin Hood had come to Nottingham and put up his horse and fed him with oats and hay, he put out his wares in the middle of the market-place and began to cry, "Pots, pots, fine, strong, and cheap." It happened that he was but little distance from the sheriff's door, and the sheriff's wife herself, looking out of the window at the unusual chaffering, saw and noted the new potter, so young and so handsome. She, poor lady, was young and handsome too—much too young and handsome for the old vindictive sheriff to whom she was wedded. She saw that the potter's cries, and his wares also, attracted many other wives and widows too. His trade was brisk, for not knowing anything of the business he sold too cheaply. Besides which, his object was not to make profit, but to make a stir. So he gladly let pots



The High-cellarer pays twofold.

that were worth fivepence go for three, and many a man whispered to his wife, "That potter will never thrive."

At last, after bargaining at such a brisk rate, he had only five pots left, and these he had a mind to present to the sheriff's wife; so he sent in to her asking if she would accept them. Delighted beyond measure, she ran to the door and beckoned Robin to her, when she thanked him with blushes and coy glances. "Gramercy, sir," she said, "when thou comest here again I will buy more of thy pots, if thou wilt."

Uncovering his head, Robin replied, "Dear lady, I swear thou shalt have of the best."

"Wilt thou come and dine with the sheriff and me?" she asked sweetly.

"Gramercy, fair lady, in that your bidding shall be done," he answered with grateful smiles. So they went into the house, a maid carrying in the pots before them. In the hall sat the sheriff, to whom the potter bowed.

"Look what this good potter hath given you and me," quoth the wife; "five pots, small and large."

The sheriff looked over the wares and heartily approved them, and then looked at the potter. "He is full welcome, wife; we are beholden to him. Now let us wash and go to meat."

When they were at dinner, which was served with noble cheer, Robin lost no opportunity of improving his acquaintance with the sheriff's wife. He likewise attended with one ear to the two serving men, who began to speak of a great wager that had been made between them for a shooting match, the amount being forty shillings. Robin listened, but made no remark, though in his mind he determined to be there at the shooting.

After dinner the sheriff prepared to go to this archery

match, and Robin, taking courteous leave of his hostess, asked and obtained permission to go with him. At the butts the sheriff's men made a poor show in Robin's opinion, and as he stood quietly by he said, "An I had a bow, by my faith thou shouldst see at least one shot."

"Thou shalt have a bow," said the sheriff, "the best thou wilt choose. Thou seemst a stalwart and strong young man. Thou shalt be assayed." Then he commanded one of his men to go for some bows, and Robin chose the best of them and fitted a string to it.

"Now I shall know if thou be any good at this sport, so pull it right up to thine ear."

"Heaven help me," said Robin, pulling it up too easily, "this is but right weak tackle." He stepped up to a quiver and drew out a bolt, and then shot at the mark. He went so near that he was within one foot of it. Then the two sheriff's men and he shot again, and this time Robin cleaved the prick, which is a piece of wood in the middle of the target.

At this the sheriff's men were sore and inclined to be unfriendly, but the sheriff laughed and made game of them, saying to Robin, "Potter, thou art a man. Thou art worthy to bear a bow wherever thou mayst be."

"Aha!" laughed the potter, "in my cart I have a bow, forsooth, that is a good one, and there's no lying about that. I had it of Robin Hood the bold outlaw."

The sheriff jumped. "Knowest thou Robin Hood?"

"Know him? I have shot with him a hundred times under his trysting tree."

"I had liefer than a hundred pounds that that false knave stood by me now where thou standest!"

"If that be all, come boldly with me and do as I ask

thee, and to-morrow before we eat bread I wager we shall see the outlaw."

"An thou wilt do so, honest fellow, I will requite thee, that I swear." At that they left the shooting and hied homeward, where the good wife had supper all prepared. So Robin spent a merry time, especially when the sheriff had fallen asleep after his heavy supper. In the morning, as soon as it was day, they were up and preparing to ride forth to the forest.

Robin took gentle leave of the sheriff's wife and thanked her courteously for her hospitality, adding, "Dame, if thou wilt wear it for my love, I give thee here this golden ring."

"Gramercy, gramercy," answered the lady; "yield it me and for thy sake I will wear it." The entry of the sheriff cut short these leave-takings. He was impatient to be off. Never before had his heart so yearned for the greenwood.

When they came into the woods the birds were singing joyfully, and the beauty of the woods in the morning light and freshness delighted the heart of the forester. "It is merry to be in the greenwood," he exclaimed, adding mischievously, "and that for certain if a man hath anything to spend." This the sheriff did not understand, so he said nothing. "We shall know by my horn," continued Robin, "whether Robin Hood be near at hand." At this he set the horn to his mouth and blew a good blast.

The foresters were far down in the wood, but Little John heard the blast, and gathering the men he said, "I hear the master's horn! follow, ye men!" It was not long before the sheriff's ears heard the trample of twigs and his eyes saw the form of Little John running up,

who cried as he drew near, "Good morrow, Master Potter. How hast thou fared at Nottingham? Hast sold all thy ware?"

"Yea, by my truth, have never a care for that, Little John. I have brought back the sheriff of Nottingham in exchange for my goods."

"He is full welcome. These are good tidings, i'faith, master."

Now the sheriff's heart began to thump and he would had liefer than a hundred pounds that he were out of the wood again and safe back at Nottingham. He saw the whole plot, and with a face pale with fright and passion he turned to Robin, saying, "Had I known this before we left Nottingham thou shouldst not have come back into this forest in a thousand years."

"That wot I well enow, and heartily I thank heaven that I am here now, and for this reason, sir sheriff, thou shalt leave thy horse with us and your other gear also."

"God forbid that I should lose my goods in that way."

"Thou camest here on a high horse to capture Robin Hood. He wills that thou shalt go back afoot. Greet well thy fair and good wife for me, and take for her a white palfrey which, tell her, ambleth as the wind. For the love of thy wife thou shalt sing of no more sorrow for this day."

So the mutual host and guest parted, the sheriff ambling back to Nottingham on his wife's palfrey.

Then Robin sought out the potter with whom he had changed clothes. "Potter," he asked, "what were those pots of thine worth that I took to Nottingham?"

"They were worth a pound. So much could I have made of them an I had been there to sell them."

"Thou shalt have ten pounds, then, and whenever thou comest to the greenwood, welcome, potter, thou shalt be."

So the potter went on his way with his empty cart and his pockets full of money, thanking his luck for such a profitable and pleasant holiday in the greenwood.

When the sheriff had reached home he was met by his wife at the door. "How hast thou fared in the forest?" she asked. "Hast thou brought Robin Hood home with thee?"

"The devil speed him, body and bone. He hath put upon me a great shame and scorn. He hath taken my horse and the gold I carried and hath sent this palfrey to thee. The potter was e'en Robin Hood himself."

At this the lady set up a laugh so long and so loud that she added much to the sheriff's chagrin, and when she could speak again, she said, "Now hast thou paid for all the pots that he gave me; but since thou'rt safe back again, what matters it? Thou hast goods enough still."

IX

THE BEGGAR

THE adventure in the potter's clothes having turned out so successfully Robin Hood had a mind to steal another march upon the sheriff by the same ruse. So one fine morning he mounted his steed and rode towards Nottingham, leaving word for his men to be in readiness for his signal there in case he should want them.

As he rode he kept on the look-out for a likely person whose clothes would make a good disguise, and he had not gone far before he encountered a beggar. This fellow wore a coat that was stained and faded and very much patched; and his body was hung around with several bags which waggled as he walked.

"God speed, God speed!" cried Robin to him; "what countryman art thou, friend?"

"I am Yorkshire, sir. Hast aught in charity to give me?"

"Why, what wouldst thou have?"

"Aha! what, thou askest. I'faith! a penny will content me. 'Tis not for lands nor livings that I ask."

"A penny thou sayest; but I have no money. I am but a wood-ranger and an outlaw, as every one doth know. My name is Robin Hood. But that's neither here nor there. I want a bout with thee, my bonnie beggar, and I'll fight thee for thy coat, and here is mine. Lay thine beside it." So saying, Robin Hood doffs his green mantle and places it upon the ground.

"Agreed, agreed!" cries the beggar, pulling off his old coat in a trice and placing it beside the other. "Thou'lt have the worse of this bargain all ways, friend Robin, for I hope to rout thee cleanly and then have at thy purse."

The beggar had a good long staff which he gripped and shook as though itching to begin; and Robin drew his blade, which was sharp enough, although it was not polished bright as swords are in these days. Then the beggar closed in and began to lay on. The thought of the mantle and other spoils of the fight animated him to bold and terrible work.

"Fight on, fight on!" cried Robin; "this game pleaseth me right well." But that was brag which the forester uttered to hearten himself, for the beggar was getting in three blows to his one, so quick he was with the staff. They kept hard at it until the beggar was the first to draw blood, and when Robin felt it trickling down his face he concluded that his man was well proved. So he cried, "Hold, hold thy hand! Thou and I can well agree, that I see full well."

"That will be true," quoth the beggar, "if thou givest me thy mantle."

"Nay, a full change," said Robin. "Give me thy clothes entire, and thy bags to boot, and I'll resign to thee, not my mantle only, but my horse and all my bravery."

The beggar was beside himself with delight. He quickly divested himself of his dirty old clothes, with which Robin unhesitatingly clad himself. Turning himself about the outlaw king exclaimed, "Methinks I make a brave and stout beggar, and here are my bags," he added, as he slung them over his shoulder. "One for

my bread, another for corn, one for salt, another for malt, and, i'faith, here is one that will just take my little horn. So now here goes to do some begging."

The beggar was dumbfounded at all this, but as he had profited very well by the bargain he was content to leave matters as they were, and believing Robin to be a lunatic he bade him farewell and marched off in his fine clothes, leading the horse by the bridle.

Robin betook himself to the town and shuffled along towards the sheriff's house with the idea of asking for relief; but on his way he heard from the gossips that three men were condemned to die that morning for deer-stealing.

Upon arrival at the sheriff's house he was accosted by a fine gentleman who asked him his business. "What I have come to crave," replied the forester, "is not meat nor drink, but the lives of three yeomen that are to be taken this day."

"That cannot be, my man," said the official. "The case is so clear against them that I tell thee that without doubt they must be hanged for stealing the king's deer."

Unable to do any good here, Robin went to where the gallows was erected, and there he saw many signs of sorrow and many tearful eyes. So he went up to those who wept and said, "Never fear, and dry your tears, for of a certainty your good men shall not die this day." At these words he took his horn out of his bag and blew three blasts upon it, whilst the crowd looked upon him in amazement. Some knew him by his blast, and a soft commotion went through the crowd, with many nudgings, and winks, and smiles. Presently there was a pushing and jostling through the people, and as Robin raised his



The pottery attracts the wives and widows

hand and made himself seen and known, his archers came around him and awaited his orders.

Robin quickly told them what was afoot and what was to be done. "Shoot east, shoot west," he commanded, "and spare no man."

At this sudden attack the sheriff's guard, always fearful of the outlaws and perhaps not quite out of sympathy with them, dropped their pikes and melted away out of the crowd. The sheriff was one of the first to retreat. He always seems to have had a mortal dread of flying arrows.

Nothing remained but for Robin to go up to the condemned men and liberate them. In their joy and gratitude at being delivered they eagerly joined Robin's troop at the first offer, and marched away with them amongst the cheers of the people.

It was in this way that the company of outlaws was always kept up to full strength, for so great was Robin Hood's personal influence and charm, that any man who had been saved from death or injustice by his pluck and generosity was only too eager to come under his banner and serve him; partly in gratitude and admiration, and partly for the free and unrestrained life his wonderful organisation made possible and safe.

X

LITTLE JOHN AS THE SHERIFF'S MAN

WHEN all but a year had passed since the Sir Richard redeemed his lands, it happened that the sheriff of Nottingham proclaimed an archery contest, and the news of this coming to the foresters Little John decided to try his luck. The greatest test of skill was the splitting of a peeled willow-wand by an arrow shot at a great distance. But this was nothing to Little John. So he got his bow and arrows into good trim, and disguising himself so that the sheriff should not know him, he journeyed to Nottingham and took his place among the competitors. The sheriff was standing close by the targets, wands, and other marks ; but little did he guess that the wonderful bowman who split the wand three times cleanly and with the greatest ease was one of the band that he was always trying to catch, and that only because there was a large reward awaiting any one who did catch them. He swore a great oath and said, " This man is the best archer I ever saw." Then he turned to Little John and asked a lot of questions : " What is thy name ? In what country wert thou born ? and where dost thou live ? "

" I was born in Holdernes," replied the marksman, " and men call me Reynold Greenleaf when I am at home."

" Then what dost thou say, Reynold Greenleaf, to serving with me ? I'll give thee twenty marks a year."

" I thank your worship ; but I have a master already,

and a courteous knight he is. If ye would first have leave of him the better it would be."

"'Twould be better for thee that thou shouldst take leave of him and come to me," replied the sheriff. And so they haggled until at last Little John bethought him that he might serve Robin well by getting into the enemy's camp, so he consented. The sheriff was right glad, for he hoped that such a good marksman would be able to pick off his foe Robin with some certainty. So Little John went into his service and was provided with a great strong horse suitable to such a mighty rider.

Now that John was the sheriff's man he at once began to use his wits to revenge all the plaguing that his new master had caused the company in the greenwood. "Heaven help me!" he said, "if I am not the very worst servant that ever he had yet." An opportunity soon came and the yeomen did not fail to seize it.

It befell that upon a certain day the sheriff rose very early in the morning to go hunting; but Little John felt lazy and stayed in bed, where he was forgotten by everybody. He lay there till he grew hungry and then he arose to look for a meal. Finding nothing, he went to the steward, and said, "Good sir steward, I prithee let me have some dinner. It is far too long for Master Greenleaf to go fasting."

Said the steward, "Thou shalt neither eat nor drink till my lord come back if I can help it."

"I vow to heaven," said John, "I would rather crack thy crown than wait till then."

Here the butler, thinking of his charge, ran to the buttery and shut fast the door, which Little John thought very disobliging, so he gave him a rap that nearly broke his back in two, and had he lived a hundred years he had never

forgotten it. Then Little John heaved a kick at the door which burst it open and in he went and enjoyed himself, taking a good allowance of ale and wine.

The sheriff's kitchen was in charge of a wondrous strong and plucky cook, and he came, too, and let John understand that he was wrong to carry things with so high a hand, and to his reproofs he added three lusty cuffs, just when John did not expect them.

"Good!" said the forester. "Fine strokes those! Thou art a bold and hardy man, and before I leave this place I will try thee a little further." So he ate a little more and then drew his sword and came out of the buttery. When the cook saw him he also took a sword and they began to lay about them for as long as a man might walk two miles or more. Neither gave in, but both stood stiffly to it, and so well they guarded that after an hour neither had got any hurt. "By my faith," said Little John, "thou art one of the best swordsmen I ever saw. Could'st thou shoot with a bow as well, thou shouldst go with me into the greenwood and have two suits of clothes a year as well as twenty marks from Robin Hood."

"Done!" cried the cook. "Put up your sword and I'm your man!" Then he fetched a doe pasty and some good bread and more wine, and Little John set to again and the cook also, and they plighted truth together that they would both be with Robin Hood that very night.

These two shameless men then went to the sheriff's treasury, and although the locks of it were all of good steel they broke them all and took away the silver vessels, plate, spoons, and everything of value they could lay hands on; besides money to the amount of three hundred pounds.

With this plunder they set off for Robin Hood's tree, and, when they drew nigh, Little John shouted, "God save thee, good master!"

"Welcome back to thee!" cried Robin, "and welcome to that fair yeoman thou bringest with thee. What tidings from Nottingham?"

"The proud sheriff greeteth thee, master, and sendeth thee here by me his cook, his silver plate, and three hundred pounds."

At this Robin smiled. "I vow," he said, "that it was never by his good will that thou didst bring me such presents." At this the laugh went round and they set about unpacking the treasure. But while they were doing so, Little John was thinking still further how he might yet discomfit the sheriff. He stole away and ran off into the forest for about five miles, to a part where he expected the sheriff would be hunting, and, sure enough, he found him. Drawing near, and never forgetting his good manners, he dropped on his knee saying, "God save thee, dear master!"

"Reynold Greenleaf!" exclaimed the astonished hunter. "Why, where hast thou been?"

"I have been in the forest," says the yeoman, "and a fair sight have I seen. One of the fairest sights I ever did see!"

"Why, what was that?"

"Yonder I saw a right fair hart of a green colour, and seven score of deer following in a herd after him. He had sixty or more branches to his antlers, and they were so sharp that I durst not shoot for fear they would slay me if he turned upon me."

"I vow I should like to see such a sight," said the sheriff.

"That thou mayst surely do, dear master. Do but come with me and I will bring thee to it."

So the sheriff rode off and the forester walked fast beside him. But little did the worthy know that by the green hart Little John meant Robin Hood, and by the sharp antlers nought but the bows of his archers.

When they had come to the tree where the company was, Little John exclaimed, "Lo! here is the master hart."

The sheriff pulled up short as the truth flashed upon him. He was filled with anger and vexation as he saw how he had been tricked right into the midst of his enemies. "Woe seize thee, Reynold Greenleaf, thou hast betrayed me!"

"If I have, master," said Little John, "I vow to heaven thou art to blame for it, for I have been indifferently served at dinner whilst I was at home with thee."

Robin, with his usual courtesy, smoothed the ruffled sheriff and treated him as a great personage. A famous meal was spread, at which the table was adorned by the silver plate and table ornaments that were the sheriff's own. The sight of this filled him with such chagrin and consternation that he could eat nothing at all.

"What ails thee, sheriff?" asked Robin. "Make good cheer, I pray thee! Thy life is in no danger. For Little John's sake it will be granted thee."

When they had supped and the day had drawn to a close, Robin commanded Little John to assist the sheriff to unrobe; to draw off his hose and his shoes; his cloak that came down to his feet and was lined with fur, and also his kirtle. Then Little John was to wrap him in a green mantle for the night. Robin further told all his

men to do the same for themselves, so that the sheriff might see and think it was their usual custom. All that night he shivered in his breeches and shirt, and it was little wonder that he was stiff in the morning.

"Make good cheer, sheriff!" said Robin. "This is how we order our life under the greenwood tree."

"And a harder order never had anchorite or friar," said the wretched man. "I would not dwell here longer than I could help for all the gold in merry England."

"Nay, nay! Thou shalt dwell with me here a twelve-month. I will teach thee to be an outlaw, sir sheriff."

"Before I lie here another night, Robin, I pray thee to smite off my head and I'll forgive it thee. So let me go for St. Charity, and I will be the best friend that ever thou hadst yet."

"So be it then! But thou must swear me an oath on my bright sword that thou wilt never, by sea or by land, do me or mine any harm; and shouldst thou find any of my men by night or by day, upon thine oath thou shalt swear to help them all thou canst."

The sheriff swore the oath and was right glad to be away and off to his home; and the old ballad says that he was as full up with greenwood as a heap of stones is with stones.

XI

THE HIGH CELLARER

WHEN the sheriff had so gladly taken himself off, the foresters roamed the woods about their business until Little John got hungry again. "Let us to supper," he said.

But Robin Hood said, "Nay; for I dread that Our Lady is wroth with me since she sends not my pay. It is a twelvemonth to-day since the knight paid for his lands at the abbey; but he hath not come to the trysting tree."

"Have no doubt, master! The sun hath not sunk yet, and I dare swear the knight is true and trusty."

"May it prove so, Little John. And now take ye your bow in hand and walk up to the Sayles, and Watling Street, where ye first met him. Take Mutch and Scathelock with thee again, and perchance ye may meet the knight. But come not back without some guest, whether he be stranger or messenger or minstrel or eke a poor man. Whoever he be, he shall have good fare."

Forth then started the three men, half vexed for having to wait for their dinner and with a fine edge to their appetites. They looked east and west, but there was no soul in sight. Presently as they were watching they saw two black monks come along the highway from Barnsdale. Each was mounted on a palfrey.

"I dare lay my life that these monks have brought our pay," said John. "Make glad cheer! Let us freshen our bows and look to our strings and be steady and sure. Why, look! there come half a hundred men and seven sumpters! I warrant there be no bishop in the land that rideth so royally. My brothers, there are but three of us, yet if we bring not all these home to dinner we dare not face the master. Now bend your bows and make all that crowd to stand. Mark each your man. As for me, I hold the life and death of the foremost monk closed within my hand."

When the company had drawn near and saw the three men with bows drawn ready to let fly they stopped short, whilst Little John approached the foremost. "Abide, thou churl!" he cried. "If thou goest further, by Heaven, thy death is in my hand. May evil alight on thy head—right under thy hat-band; for thou hast made our master wroth fasting so long for thee."

"Who is thy master?"

"Robin Hood."

"A bold thief, and I never yet heard any good of him."

"Now that is false, as thou shalt see. He is a yeoman of the forest and hath bidden thee to dine with him."

Here Mutch, who was ready with a bolt, let fly at the monk's chest and knocked him down. At this all the bold young men who made up the escort took to their heels, save a little page and a groom leading the sumpter horses. So the three brought their monk to the door of Robin Hood's lodge, whether he would or not, to speak to their captain face to face. When Robin saw the

monk he doffed his hood, but the monk was not so courteous and left his hood as it was.

"What a churl it is, master," said Little John.

"Deal lightly with him for that," said Robin, "for he knoweth not what courtesy means. How many men had this monk with him, Little John?"

"Fifty-two when first we met them; but most of them fled."

"Let blow a horn to call our fellowship together."

So a blast was blown, at the sound of which a hundred and forty stout yeomen appeared in a few minutes. They were clad some in scarlet and some in grey. As they drew near to take the orders of their captain, Robin set them to work to prepare the feast. The monk was made to wash himself and to say the masses, and both Robin Hood and Little John waited upon him with much reverence.

"Do well for thyself, monk," said the captain.

"Gramercy, sir," said the guest.

"Where is your abbey, when you are at home; and who is your patron saint?"

"St. Mary is the abbey at which I serve."

"In what office?"

"That of high cellarer."

"The more welcome, thou! Fill of the best wine, ye men. This cellarer shall drink to me. But I have great marvel that all this long day Our Lady sendeth not my money. I fear me she is wroth with me."

"Have no doubt, dear master," quoth Little John; "I dare swear this monk hath brought it, since he cometh from her abbey."

"And she was a surety," said Robin, turning to the

monk, "of a little sum of money that I lent a good night under this greenwood tree. So if, indeed, thou hast brought it, I prithee let me see the colour of it, and, in return, if thou hast need of me at any time I will help thee."

The monk made a wry face and swore a great round oath. "Of the loan thou speakest of have I never heard."

"Monk," said Robin, "I will wager that thou art to blame in this, for God is just and so is His Lady. Thou hast told me with thine own tongue that thou art her servant, serving her every day. That thou canst not deny. Therefore it seems to me that thou must needs be her messenger, bringing to me my due. Prithee, how much is in thy coffers? Tell me truly."

"Sir, I have twenty marks, and that is the truth I tell thee."

"If there be no more than that I will touch no penny of it, and if thou hast need of any more I will freely lend thee. But if I find more than this, I promise thee thou shalt forego it, sir monk, although of loose silver for thy travelling needs I will touch nothing." Robin then called to Little John: "Go forth and find me the truth; for if there be no more than twenty marks I will not touch a penny of it."

Then Little John spread his mantle upon the ground as he had done before and told out of the monk's coffers something over eight hundred pounds. Letting it lie there he came back to Robin and said, "Master, the monk is true enough. Our Lady hath sent thee double thy due."

"Now, what did I tell thee, monk? I trow that Our Lady is the truest woman that ever I did see. By

heaven, if ye were to search all England through ye would never find such a well-paid loan. Fill up again, men, with the best wine, and drink to him. And thou, sir monk, greet well our courteous Lady, and tell her that if She hath any need of Robin Hood She will find him a true friend. And if She needeth any more silver, come thou again to me, and She shall have three times as much as thou hast now brought me."

Now the real object of the monk's journey, which he had been forced to finish so abruptly, was, in truth, a visit to a court of law in London. The abbot had not forgiven the knight for the lordly trick he had played by redeeming his lands, so he and the justice were trying to find some legal quibble by which they could bring him to his feet from the high horse he was riding. Yet when Robin inquired of the monk where he was going, that cunning rogue blandly said: "Sir, to certain manors in this county, to reckon with some bailiffs who have done us much wrong."

"Come forth again, Little John! There is no better yeoman than thyself for searching a monk's coffers. There is another thou hast not yet opened. We must know the truth about that."

Then the monk lost his temper. "Thou pratest of courtesy," he said. "Is it courtesy to beat, bind, and rob a man after bidding him to dinner?"

"It is a very old custom with us," answered Robin, "to leave as little as possible behind when good things come in our way."

The monk stormed and raged, but his horse was soon brought to him, and at the sight of deliverance he grew calmer. He lost no time in mounting it and

putting it to the spur, for he was in a great hurry to be gone.

Robin begged him to take a parting cup before he went, but he cried, "No! by heaven! I rue me that I ever came so near. I might have dined much cheaper in Blythe or Doncaster."

"Greet well the abbot for me," shouted Robin to the retreating guest, "and the prior too, and bid him send me such a monk to dinner every day."



XII

THE KNIGHT AT THE TRYST

By the time the knight, Sir Richard-at-the-Lee, had accumulated four hundred pounds wherewith to repay Robin Hood, the twelvemonth had expired. So he repaired to the greenwood, taking with him also a hundred bows and a hundred sheaves of arrows with burnished heads. Every one was an ell long and fledged with peacock's feathers and notched with silver. He also gathered together one hundred men and clothed them and himself in white and red. With a lance in his hand and a man to lead the sumpter nag, he set out with his company for Barnsdale, singing as he went.

As he came to a bridge, a wrestling match was going on, and there were gathered all the best men out of the west country. There were fine prizes for the games: a white bull, a courser with saddle and bridle, a pair of gloves, a golden ring, and a pipe of wine.

Amongst those who strove was a yeoman, who was a stranger, and he did well at all the games, but being friendless, he did not come by fair play, and indeed was

in danger of his life. This yeoman stirred the pity of Sir Richard-at-the-Lee, who vowed that, for the sake of Robin Hood, he should come to no harm. So he pressed with his men into the place, made room, and let the yeoman speak for himself. Then he took him by the hand and did him justice by giving him five marks for the wine which he had won. And he bade them broach it, so that all should drink and be merry.

All this tarrying here at the sports was causing Robin Hood to wait for his dinner until three hours past noon ; for this was the day he expected his knight to return and pay back the loan. After Sir Richard-at-the-Lee had done justice for the yeoman at the wrestling, he hurried as fast as he was able to the greenwood tree to keep his word with Robin Hood. And there he found the forest king with all his merry men. He alighted from his palfrey and went down on his knee to the forester, courteously doffing his hood and saying, " God save thee, good Robin Hood, and all this company."

" Right welcome art thou, gentle knight," Robin Hood responded. " What need driveth thee to the greenwood again ? And what has kept thee so long away ? I pray thee tell me."

" The abbot and the high justice did try hard to keep my lands ; but thanks to God and to thee I have them yet. And be not grieved that I am come so late, for on my way I came to a place where was a wrestling, and there I found a poor yeoman who was wronged of his due and whom I helped."

" By heaven I thank thee, sir knight. When a man helpeth a poor yeoman he hath won me for a friend."

" Here have I brought thy four hundred pounds,

which thou didst lend me, and I pray thee take also another twenty marks to pay thy great courtesy."

"Nay, nay, keep it all for thine own use, for already Our Lady hath sent full remittance by her high cellarer, and if I were to take payment twice it would be a shame to me. Nevertheless thou art truly welcome, gentle knight." Then Robin told Sir Richard the whole tale of the monk and his coffers, and heartily they both laughed that the abbey was despoiled of its ill-gotten gains. The knight had yet more to offer, for Robin espied all the gifts he had brought.

"But what do all these bows mean?" he asked, "and these arrows feathered so fairly?"

"They are but a poor present to thee, Robin."

Then Robin was touched by the knight's gratitude. "Come forth, Little John, and go to my treasury, and bring me thence the four hundred pounds that the monk told out too much."

The money was brought and handed to the knight. "Have here four hundred pounds from me, thou gentle and true knight, and buy with it horses and good harness, and have thy spurs gilt anew. And if thou findest thy purse failing come to Robin Hood and, by my troth! thou shalt fail none whilst I have ought. As for the four hundred pounds I lent to thee, spend it. Go not so sparingly, but take my counsel and appoint thee nobly in all ways."

XIII

GUY OF GISBORNE

ONE morning a golden ouzel sang so loudly near to where Robin was sleeping that it awoke him. He sat up, yawned and stretched, and then told his companions of a dream that the bird's song had broken. "I dreamt," said he, "that there were two trusty yeomen who fought with me. Methought they did beat and bind me and took away my bow. If I be Robin and am alive I'll be revenged upon them."

"Dreams are neither here nor there, master," said Little John. "Like the wind that blows on the hills, which though it blow ever so hard to-night will be still to-morrow."

"Be that as it may," answered Robin, "to-day I shall go and see if I may meet any like those two yeomen of my dream, and thou, John, shalt go with me."

As nobody dared dispute the captain's word preparations were made. The men put on their green mantles, and took bows and arrows, and set forth through the forest. After an hour or so it seemed that Robin's dream had some portent after all, for they saw a stranger who leaned his body against a tree. He carried a sword and a dagger and was clad in a horse hide, mane and tail complete.

The men stopped short and spied upon this new character ; and Robin looked at John with certain grave nods of the head as though to say, " Thou see'st ! What of dreams and the wanton winds now ? "

But Little John, always readier for action than for thought, said, " Stand you still here, master, under this tree, and I will go to yonder stout yeoman and know what he doth mean."

" Ah ! John, 'tis little store thou settest by me, then, and that meseems is a strange thing. When didst thou know me to send my men on before whilst I tarried in safety behind ? It is not so cunning a thing after all to know what a man would mean if the man do but speak. By my troth ! an I did not fear breaking my bow, friend John, I would break thy head with it."

Little John was a faithful friend, warm-hearted and easily stirred, and though he loved his master, yet he took these words too gravely, and answered back with words a degree worse and then walked off in dudgeon.

When he had got as far as Barnsdale, where he knew every road and path, he came upon a matter that caused him great sorrow. Coming suddenly into a little valley he saw two men lying still, and coming up to them found that they were two of his own fellows, and both dead. Then hearing a bustle of hurrying men, he looked through some bushes and saw Scathelock flying fast afoot over stocks and stones and the sheriff and a crowd of his men rushing after him. " One shot will I now have to stop that sheriff who flies so fast after poor Will," said Little John. But when his bow was bent nearly double it snapped and fell in halves at his feet.

"Woe be to thee, accursed wood, that ever thou grew on a tree ; for now thou hast brought me sorrow, on the very day thou shouldst have brought me help."

The arrow had flown, nevertheless, loosely shot as it was, and it met one of the sheriff's men, by name William a Trent. And at this point the old ballad says that it had been better for William a Trent to have been at home on a bed of sorrow than that he should have been there to stop the stray arrow from Little John. By this it may be implied that William a Trent died of the wound.

Little John had at any rate turned the tide for Will Scathelock, for the men now set upon the new enemy, and by force of their greater numbers easily took him and bound him to a tree. Quoth the sheriff, "Thou shalt be drawn over down and through dale and then hanged high on a hill."

"But thou mayst fail of thy purpose, if it be heaven's will," replied John. Him we will now leave tied to the tree while we go back to his master.

Robin Hood went up to the stranger whom he had found in the wood with a "Good morrow, good fellow. Methinks by the bow thou bearest in thy hand thou shouldst be a good archer."

The stranger evasively replied that he had his way to find and could spare none of the morning hours.

"I'll lead thee through the wood," said Robin, "and I promise thee, good fellow, thou couldst not have a better guide."

"I seek an outlaw. Canst thou guide me to him ? Men call him Robin Hood. I would rather than forty pounds that I might meet with him this day."

"Come thou with me and thou shalt see him, I swear it. But first, may we not find a little pastime here in the greenwood? I prithee let us play a little for mastery, and we may more than likely chance upon Robin Hood at some odd moment."

With this inducement the stranger gave way to Robin's request. They cut two shrubs and set up marks in a glade, three score rods apart. "Now lead on, good fellow," quoth Robin.

"Nay, by my faith!" said the other, "my leader thou shalt be."

So Robin shot at the mark, a wand, upon which was hung a garland, and he missed it by an inch. The yeoman was a good archer, but he thought to himself that he would never beat that. He shot within the garland, but missed the wand. Then Robin shot again and split the wand.

At this the stranger was drawn towards the skilful archer. "A blessing on the heart!" he cried. "Good fellow, thy shooting is good. If thou art as sound in the heart as thou art in the hand, Robin Hood himself is no match for thee. Now tell me thy name, I prithee."

"Nay, by my faith! That I cannot do until thou hast told me thine."

"My name is Guy of Gisborne, and I am sworn to take the outlaw Robin Hood."

"Then know, friend, that I am that Robin Hood, of Barnsdale and Sherwood, whom thou hast sought so long. My dwelling is in these woods, and I set nought by thee and thy vows."

Then commenced a fight with swords between these

two worthies. For two hours they strove, yet neither one nor the other gave any sign of surrender or flight. But at last Robin, being too careless for a moment, stumbled upon a root, whereupon Guy rapidly cut in with a stroke upon Robin's left side. "Ah, dear Lady! Mother and Maid!" he cried, "it was never man's destiny to die before his day." This appeal seemed to put new life in him. He sprang up, and with a back-stroke slew Sir Guy outright. "Thou hast been a traitor all thy life," he said, "and thou must now come to an end." Cutting off the head of his foe, he stuck it upon his bow's end, after disfiguring the face with his dagger, so that no man could have known to whom the head belonged.

"Now lie there, Sir Guy. And be not wroth with me, for if thou hast had bad strokes at my hand, thou shalt have the better cloth." So saying he took off his gown and spread it over the body, after taking from it the horse hide, in which he clad himself. "And now," said he, "I will take thy bow and thy arrows and thy little horn and away to Barnsdale to see how my merry men are faring." Robin then put Sir Guy's horn to his lips and raised a loud blast, which the sheriff of Nottingham heard as he reposed under a bank near the tree to which he had bound Little John.

"Hearken, hearken!" said the sheriff. "Surely I hear the good tidings of Sir Guy's horn. He hath slain Robin Hood." In a little while Robin drew near, and when the sheriff caught sight of him he exclaimed, still thinking that Sir Guy had been victorious, "Yonder cometh that stout yeoman clad in his horse hide. Come hither, come hither, Sir Guy. Thou hast taken the

outlaw, surely. Ask what thou wilt of me and I will gladly grant it."

"Gramercy, sir sheriff, but I want none of thy gold ; only now that I have slain the master, let me go and have a strike at the man." This he said, having seen Little John bound to the tree. "I ask no other boon, nor will take any other."

"No other ? Thou art a madman," roared the sheriff. "Thou shouldst have had a knighthood and a knight's reward for such a deed ; but seeing that thou asketh such a paltry boon, why, thou mayst take it and welcome."

Little John knew the voice of his master the moment he heard it, although at first he thought the figure was that of the stranger of the morning. "Now, with heaven's help," he muttered, "I shall be loosed."

Robin strode up to him thinking to loose him at once ; but the sheriff and all the men followed quickly after him.

"Stand back, stand back !" cried Robin. "Why do ye come so near ? It hath never been the custom in our country that a man should be overheard when he is shriven."

This made the men hang back, so that Robin was able to come nearer to the tree. Then with a dash he whipped out his Irish knife and cut the thongs that bound his man, at the same time thrusting Sir Guy's bow and arrows into his hands and telling him to help himself. As soon as the sheriff saw that Little John was drawing a bolt on the bow he ran behind his men and made off. And after him all his company followed in hot haste. But the sheriff did not get away so fast as not to receive a bolt in his back as he went.

We may imagine what pledges passed between the master and man when thus they were left to themselves. We hear of no further differences between them after this second disagreement and reconciliation. The remainder of their lives, we may believe, were passed in mutual trust and friendship until the final tragic scene.

XIV

THE SILVER ARROW

AFTER the treatment the sheriff of Nottingham had received at the hands of the outlaws his mind was filled with nothing but plans and plots for revenge. The best thing he could think of was to go to London and see King Edward and complain to him. This he did, and the king listened while he said all the worst things he could think of ; how that they shot the king's deer, and robbed the abbey, and stopped honest folk on the road for what they could steal, and so on. But he said too much. He wearied the king with all these complaints, and the king at last broke out with, " Well, well ! what can I do ? Art thou not sheriff ? Must I myself go into the greenwood and seize these men ? Art thou not there to do this very work for me ? The law is still in force by which thou mayst have redress of those that injure thee. Get thee gone, and set thy wits to work to devise some trick by which thou mayst get these men into thy hands."

Then back the sheriff went, rather crestfallen, but turning over things in his mind. The best way that he could devise to get at the outlaws was to hold another shooting contest. He knew that would draw them out of the greenwood, and he was determined not to trust himself in there again. So he proclaimed that the best

archers of the north should meet one day and shoot at the butts, and he that shot the best should bear away the prize, which was a right good arrow made of silver, the head and feathers being of rich red gold, and there was none like it in England.

Tidings of this came to Robin, who told his men. "Make ye ready, ye doughty men, for I would be at that shooting. Busk ye, then, and ye shall go with me, and I will prove whether the proud sheriff be as good as his word."

Then there was mighty preparation of bows and strings and feathering of arrows, and when all was ready one hundred and forty bowmen stood awaiting the order to start. But now stepped forth a brave and cunning young man, called David of Doncaster. He placed himself before his captain and bowing low said, "Good master, wilt thou be ruled by my advice? Let us not stir from the greenwood, for I trow well that yon shooting match is but a cunning wile of the sheriff's to beguile us into his hands."

"Good David," said Robin, "I thank thee for thy care and wisdom, but to go not to the archery would smack of cowardice. Come what will, I must win the sheriff's silver arrow."

Then up spake Little John. "Listen to me, master and men. We will not go in our mantles of Lincoln green lest they should know us at a glance. We must e'en leave those behind and put on divers colours. One shall wear white, another red, another yellow, another blue. Once there we will mix with the throng and no one shall know us." This counsel was hailed and acted upon. Quickly the stores were ransacked for all the odd

clothing they had, and when all was ready they set forth in little knots of three and four. Arrived at Nottingham they found the butts good and the range long. There sat the sheriff in state looking eagerly around to espy his enemies ; but amongst as many as eight hundred people he looked in vain for the mantle and hood of the man he wanted.

Robin told off six of his men to join in the shooting with him, but all the rest he commanded to stand near him in case of an attack.

Many archers had tried their skill when at last Robin's men stepped up. First came Gilbert of the white hand, and he was followed by Little John and Scathelock. They shot so well that all the people cheered. Some cried, " Hurrah, Blue jacket ! " some " Hurrah, Brown coat ! " others, " Yellow ! Yellow ! " but when Robin shot a great shout went up for Red, for that was the colour he wore, and so sure was he that he missed nothing at all, but hit the mark every time. Next followed Mutch and one Reynolde, and they did well too, much better than the bowmen who were not outlaws. Some one said to the sheriff, " If Robin Hood and all his men were here they could not have surpassed these men who shoot so bravely."

" Ay ! " quoth the sheriff, " I hoped he would be here ; but thou seest that for all his boldness he dare not come."

Robin overheard this and it made his blood boil. " Wait, my fine fellow," thought he, " thou shalt soon discover that Robin Hood hath been here."

At the end Robin was declared to have done best and thus to have won the prize. So he stepped up to the sheriff and received the silver and gold arrow with

much courtly grace, and at that the sheriff had his doubts for he thought any one but a nobleman born would have received it differently. Robin got outside the enclosure as soon as he could and his men rallied round him ; but no sooner had they taken a few steps homeward than they heard blasts on the great horns. " Ah ! treason ! " cried Robin. " Close up, my men, and woe be to thee, evil sheriff ! Is this the way thou speedest thy guest ? In yonder forest thou promised me otherwise. Had I thee now in the greenwood, thou shouldst leave me a better pledge than a false oath."

Robin's men closed all around him and a great fight commenced. No man could get near Robin without a broken head. The outlaws shot so fiercely that their enemies could not stand up against them, and the sheriff's men soon ran away. This broke up the ambush and the foresters retreated into the greenwood. But Little John could not go far, for he had an arrow wound in his knee. " Master," he said, " if thou lovest me, and for our Lord's love, and for my service to thee these years, I pray thee never let me fall into the hands of the sheriff alive ; but take thy sword and smite off my head rather."

" I would not that thou wert slain, John," said Robin, " for all the gold in merry England, were it now in a heap before me."

" God forbid that thou shouldst part company from us, Little John," said little Mutch, and with these words he hoisted the wounded man on his back and bore him away. Many a time he put him down while he joined in shooting at the pursuers.

It happened now that they were near to the castle of

that very knight whom Robin had helped, Sir Richard-at-the-Lee, so they repaired thither and sought admittance. It was on the skirts of the wood, strongly walled and double-ditched about. The knight flung open his gates when he saw who was there and took them all in. "Welcome!" he cried. "Welcome, Robin Hood! I remember well thy great courtesy and kindness under the greenwood tree. No man in the world is so dear to me as thou art, and thou shalt be safe here in spite of the sheriff of Nottingham." Then he ordered the gates to be shut, and the drawbridge to be drawn up, and the men posted themselves on the battlements and soon drove off those who were come up to take them.

And now tables were put up and cloths spread, and all feasted right merrily. And there Robin stayed with the knight for twelve days in comfort, and Little John with him until his wound was healed.

XV

THE DEATH OF THE SHERIFF

WHEN the sheriff heard that the foresters had taken refuge in the castle of Sir Richard-at-the-Lee he was very wroth, and gathered a force of armed men to go and besiege it. They beset the walls all about whilst the sheriff sent to speak with the knight, who duly appeared upon the ramparts. Lifting his voice the sheriff exclaimed, "Thou traitor knight! Thou keepest there the king's enemy, against the laws and common justice."

"Sir," answered Sir Richard, "what I have done, I have done as a true knight. Go thy ways, sir, and trouble me no more until thou hast asked the king's will; then come again and tell me what he saith to thee."

Thus the sheriff had his answer without any shilly-shallying, and acting on the advice he rode straightway off to London again, bursting with indignation and eagerness to tell the king. When the king received him, he poured out a scandalous tale of Sir Richard and Robin Hood and his archers. "This knight, my liege, upholds all that he hath done in maintaining this band of outlaws. He calls himself lord, and sets your authority at naught in all the north country."

At this the king was a little disturbed and said, "I myself will be at Nottingham within a fortnight, and will take this knight and Robin Hood also. Go home, good sheriff, and muster archers enough for the work from all parts of your country."

So the sheriff took his leave, well pleased with his mission. But when he came to Nottingham he found, much to his anger, that Robin had left the castle and gone back to the greenwood, where he had been joined by Little John, now quite cured of his wound. Since, therefore, the outlaw had escaped him he determined not to let the knight slip; and in order to accomplish the seizure he set watches and ambushes day and night to capture Sir Richard when he should go abroad. Indeed, it happened that the knight went hawking along the river side, and was there taken by an armed force, bound hand and foot, and carried to Nottingham.

The sheriff, glad as he was, swore that he would rather than a hundred pounds that it had been Robin.

When the knight's wife, a very fair lady, heard that her lord had been captured by the sheriff's men, she got to horse and rode to the greenwood to seek succour of Robin Hood, and as her palfrey drew near to the tree she greeted the outlaw crying, "God save thee, good Robin Hood, and all thy company! Grant me a boon for our dear Lady's sake. Do not let my lord and husband be shamefully slain. He is even now being taken to Nottingham and only for his love to thee."

"Dear lady," quoth Robin, "who hath taken your lord?"

"The proud sheriff," said she. "It is the truth I tell thee. He is not yet three miles on his way."

Then up started Robin Hood as though he had been mad. "Busk ye, my merry men, here is an errand for us. By heaven! he that laggeth or standeth out shall dwell with me no more." The whole seven score bowmen sprang into action. In a few moments off they went, leaping ditches and bursting hedges as they ran after the horses of their leaders. "I would fain see the knight, I vow," said Robin, "and will take no peace until I take him."

When they reached Nottingham they swarmed through the streets and very soon met the sheriff himself, who, having been told of this invasion of foresters, had come out with his guard to quell them. "Stay, thou proud sheriff," cried Robin. "Thou hast been to see the king: I would fain hear tidings of him. By heaven! it is seven years since we went so fast afoot as we have come to-day, and I swear to heaven thou wilt not find my haste to thy advantage."

Saying this, the outlaw drew his bow and let fly an arrow at the sheriff, who fell where he stood and lay there. Before anything could be done Robin had drawn his sword and smitten off his head. "Lie thou there, proud sheriff, and evil mayst thou shrive, for no man might trust thee whilst thou wert alive."

The foresters with their swords set upon the sheriff's guard, who went down one after the other, so fierce was the onslaught. Rushing then to where the knight lay bound, Robin cut his bonds, placed a bow in his hand, and bade him stand by him. When they had cleared a way for themselves to the town gates, Robin said to Sir Richard, "Leave thy horse behind and learn to run, for thou shalt with me to the forest through by-ways of moss

and fen, and thou shalt dwell with me until I get grace and pardon from our comely King Edward for this adventure."

Thus did Robin and his men utterly quell the sheriff's guard and bring off the good knight into safety.



XVI

THE KING IN THE GREENWOOD

TRUE to his word, the king, with a grand array of knights, came to Nottingham with the object of taking Sir Richard-at-the-Lee, and Robin Hood too, if he could. He made many inquiries about them both of all the country side as he came, and when he had heard all the particulars of the case and understood what had taken place, he was so enraged that he seized the knight's lands.

Passing through certain forests where he had been wont to see large herds of deer, he was surprised to find scarce a head. The glades seemed deserted. This filled him with anger again, and he swore a good deal, saying, "I wish I could but see this Robin Hood with my own eyes." But this was not all. So scandalised was he at Sir Richard's consorting with the outlaw that he vowed that whoever should smite off the head of Sir Richard-at-the-Lee should have his lands as a reward. "I'll

give them to him," said his majesty, "with my charter, sealed by my own hand, to have and to hold for evermore."

Then up spake an old and trusted nobleman. "Ah! my liege, let me speak one word on this affair. There is no man in the whole country who could take the knight's head while Robin Hood runs or rides free and bears a bow in his hand. My lord the king, make this offer to none that ye wish any good to, that he himself may not be so unlucky as to lose the best ball in his hood."

This sage advice was not needed, for although the king stayed half a year at Nottingham he could never hear a word of Robin Hood, or learn in which of his haunts he might be found. As for Robin, he went on just the same, by hill and by dale, slaying the deer as he had need of them at his will.

At last a clever forester in the king's service offered some cunning counsel. "My liege," he said, "if thou wouldst see good Robin, thou must do as I tell thee. Take five of your best knights and walk down by yonder abbey, and be dressed up in monk's weeds. I will be your leader and show you where to go, and I will wager my head that before ye come back to Nottingham ye shall meet with Robin if he be alive."

This pleased the king mightily. He lost no time in acting upon it. Repairing to the abbey he borrowed monks' robes for himself and five of his trusted knights. He wore a broad brimmed hat and stiff riding boots, just as an abbot would wear upon a journey. Following behind were his steed and two or three sumpter horses for a bait to allure the outlaws. Having ridden through

the town, he next turned towards the greenwood, singing as he went and much enjoying the joke.

When they had gone about a mile into the woods who should they meet but good Robin himself, standing in the way with a company of archers and barring the passage of those he supposed were monks. Robin stepped up to the king's horse and took the bridle in his hand, saying, "Sir abbot, by your leave, ye must abide awhile here. We be yeomen of this forest, and we live by the king's bounty, on his own deer, having nothing else to live on. But ye have fine churches, and plentiful rents always being paid ye. Now, for the sake of St. Charity, I beg ye will share your gold with us."

Then answered the king, "I have brought but forty pound with me, for I have been at Nottingham this fortnight past with our king, and have spent upon the gallant lordings there great sums, so that I have only this forty pound left to me. If I had a hundred I would share it with thee."

Robin then made the king produce the forty pounds, and dividing it into halves he gave twenty to his men, bidding them be merry with it, and returned the other twenty to the king with much courtesy, saying, "Sir, keep ye this for thy present needs. We shall meet again another day."

"Gramercy, good ranger!" answered the king, quite overcome by this fair restraint of the outlaw, "but I have a message to thee from King Edward. He greeteth thee and sendeth thee his seal, bidding thee come forthwith to Nottingham to dine with him."

Robin fell upon his knee. "I love no man so well as I do my king," he said. "Welcome is my lord's seal,

and welcome art thou, sir monk, for thy good tidings. And for the sake of those tidings, and for the love of my king, thou shalt this day dine with me under my trysting tree."

Straightway he took the king by the hand and led him to the tree. Many a deer was slain to provide the feast, and Robin, blowing a loud blast on a great horn, called up all his men. The whole one hundred and forty presented themselves and dropped upon their knee to Robin, at which the king marvelled much, and said to himself, "This is a wonderful and goodly sight to see. Methinks this forest king hath his men more at his bidding than my men are at mine."

In a very short space of time the dinner was served and all set to in earnest, Robin himself and Little John waiting upon the king "with all their might," as the old ballad says. They set before him fine brown ale, prime venison, fowls, good white bread, and good red wine. "Make good cheer, abbot," says Robin, in his usual hospitable phrase, "and may blessings fall upon thee for these tidings of thine. Before thou leavest us thou shalt see what life we lead here, that thou mayst inform the king when thou meetest him."

When the appetites of the company began to fail, the talking increased. The king swore that he had never been better feasted, and Robin, taking up a can of ale, said, "Now, merry men all, let each have his can and drink with me : Here's a health unto the king." Everybody quaffed and shouted, the king himself among them, and much he relished the fun of drinking his own health.

When the meal was ended the men rose eagerly at the

command of their leader, who ordered a shooting match to show the guest what kind of sport went on in the woods. For the truth is that he and Sir Richard had been contriving some whispered words about the abbot, both agreeing that neither he nor the five monks were what they seemed ; so Robin judged it well to show off to the best advantage his forces and what they could do, in case the visitor should be any one of importance.

The foresters smartly got their bows into trim, and at the sight of so many bent bows the king began inwardly to quail, suspecting treachery ; but he was soon assured when he saw two rods set up as marks. The distance at which they were placed apart amazed him. " It is fifty paces too long," he said. Rose garlands were hung as targets, and the men shot from the shade of the lime trees. " Whoso faileth to go through the rose garland," cried Robin, " forfeiteth his shooting tackle, be it never so fine ; and he shall also receive a buffet upon his bare head." And the captain spared not his buffets to those in his lot that missed the mark. He shot twice himself and each time cleaved the stalk, and Gilbert of the white hand did no worse. Little John and Scathelock sometimes failed, and when they did Robin smote them sorely in accordance with the rules.

At last he himself failed of the garland by the width of three fingers or more, upon which Gilbert spake up quickly, " Master, thy tackle is forfeit, now stand out and take thy pay."

Perhaps this was only a ruse on Robin's part to find out more certainly about the abbot, for he answered, " If it be so, then I cannot help myself. Sir abbot, to thee

I deliver mine arrow, and I pray thee, sir, serve me with my punishment."

"It would ill become me, considering my holy order, to smite so good a yeoman on any account, for fear I should offend him," answered the king.

"Oh, never fear, but smite boldly. Thou hast my leave."

"At this the abbot smiled and quietly turned up his sleeve, and then he fetched Robin such a mighty buffet as felled him to the earth. "I swear, on my oath," said the captain when he had picked himself up, "that thou art a stalwart friar. There's pith in thine arm. I doubt not thou canst shoot too."

Here the king and Robin gazed at each other steadily, and up stepped Sir Richard-at-the-Lee, and wistfully regarding the stalwart monk for a moment, dropped upon his knee before him. At this Robin did likewise, and when the outlaws saw it they also bent the knee. "Now do I know thee for my lord the King of England," quoth Robin, "and crave mercy under your own trysting tree of thy grace and goodness for me and for all my men. Yes! 'fore God, I beg of thee mercy for all my men and for me."

"Yes! 'fore God," responded the king, "I will grant thy petition if thou and thy company will give over this life, leave the greenwood, and come straight with me to my court, there to dwell with me."

"I make mine avow to God," quoth Robin, "that it shall be so. I will come to thy court and see thy service, and bring my men. But, my liege, if your service likes me not, then do I come again to the greenwood, to shoot at the dun deer as ever I was wont to do."

The king made no demur to this condition, and after

more drinking and merriment he began to think of going home. He wanted his monkish disguise no longer. "Hast thou any of thy Lincoln green that thou mayst sell to me ?"

"Ay, my liege ! thirty yards or more."

"Then I pray thee sell me enough for myself and my men, so that we may cast off these monks' weeds and go back to Nottingham in our proper guise:"

"My liege, I were a great fool did I not help thee and thy knights to clothes more fit for thine estate than those grey gowns. I trow there will come a day when thou wilt clothe me against the Yuletide." By this Robin Hood meant that when he was in the king's service he would receive the usual winter issue of clothing which was a custom of the royal household. He now pressed all the tailors of the company into the work, who set about cutting and stitching as fast as they could. And in two or three hours there were six mantles of Lincoln green ready, in which the king and his knights arrayed themselves, after doffing the monks' robes. Their riding boots they still wore ; but Robin furnished them with belts, caps, bows, and arrows from his stores.

Then there was a great departure ; for many of the foresters accompanied their captain, though not the greater part, in spite of what Robin had promised the king. So the tree and the lodge and all the stores were left with sufficient guard, for Robin in his heart did not feel that he would be long a servant of his sovereign. He liked his liberty too well. In the forest he was somebody ; in the court he would be almost a nobody. But now, at any rate, off he went, riding side by side with the king, and Sir Richard at his elbow.

On their way they kept up their shooting match with much glee and merriment, playing at what was called plucke-buffet. Many a buffet did the king give Robin that day when a careless shot was made, and in return Robin did not spare the king either. "Heaven help me!" said Edward, "thy little game is not easy to learn. If I shot all this year I should not get even with thee, friend Robin."

So they went wagering their buffets until they came to Nottingham. Here the people were amazed to see a throng of men covering all the fields and all dressed in the outlaws' green. They immediately took fright. They had seen the king and his knights go forth to capture Robin Hood, and now they looked for his majesty in vain, seeing only a great company of the outlaws who, they imagined, had slain the king and were now marching upon the town. They raised the cry at once, "The king is slain! Here be the outlaws upon us, and not one of us will be left alive!" Men, boys, and women alike all fled for their lives, and the ballad says that the old women who could not run hopped away on their sticks.

The king laughed loud and long at the sight of this panic, and at last commanded them to stay as he made himself known. So with a great relief the townspeople came to the king and eagerly received him. A feast was prepared and everybody made merry. Mirth and music were in the air.

King Edward called to him the knight Sir Richard-at-the-Lee, and with kind words forgave him and restored to him his lands, bidding him be a dutiful knight. At this Robin knelt at the king's feet and thanked him as though the favour had been granted to himself.

After this there was great leave taking. Sir Richard returned to his wife and his castle and Robin Hood followed the king to London, where he served as the king's valet, taking amongst his followers his faithful Little John and Scathelock.

XVII

ROBIN RETURNS TO THE GREENWOOD FROM COURT

It is often thought that all these tales of the bold outlaw are the mere inventions of ballad makers, but they must not be thus dismissed. The men who, in olden days, made songs, usually took some subject for their poetry that was already familiar to their hearers. The stories of great men and great deeds that were handed down from father to son by word of mouth were exactly the kind of material that the poets preferred to use, because such subjects found the readiest listeners. In this way traditions have been safeguarded and immortalised, and they have the spirit of truth in them that in some way tells us more than the letter of historical records written by command of kings.

It might be believed that such a fact as Robin Hood's post in the household of Edward II. was, at any rate, pure invention; but the truth is, that in the documents containing accounts of expenses in the king's household the name of "Robyn Hode" occurs several times as receiving threepence a day as one of the "*vadlets porteurs de la chambre*" of the king. Threepence meant much more then than it does now. The first entry of his name occurs under the date of April 25, 1324.

The Rev. Joseph Hunter, who investigated all these matters and published in 1852 an "historical tract" upon the great hero of the ancient minstrelsy of England, Robin Hood, says: "We see, then, that this person called Robyn Hod, whoever he was, was in full service of the king from the 24th day of March, in the year following that when the king, after being in Lancashire, spent five or six weeks at and about Nottingham, leaving the neighbourhood a little before Christmas. There is surely a remarkable coincidence between the ballad and the record, hardly to be accounted for by the chance occurrence of two persons of the same name."

The writer goes on to adduce more interesting evidence, amongst which is an entry referring to Robin Hood's cessation of the work of porter of the chamber, after which the name occurs no more in the records.

The ballad tells us that Robin had dwelt in the king's court but fifteen months when he found that he had spent a hundred pounds. For with his open-handed liberality he had not spared cash in his dealings with knights and squires. It was his aim never to be thought mean or miserly, and he had acted up to his ideal only too well. Now he found himself without means, and not only without means, but, as a consequence, perhaps, without friends too, except for the faithful Little John and Scathelock; and he began to long very bitterly for the green woods and the active life and freedom from discipline. He thought how joyous it would be to look down a long green alley in the woods with the sun gilding and flecking the stems and leaves, and the breezes rustling in the branches. He pictured a deer moving across

into the shade of the trees, and pined to pull his long bow and bring down the quarry.

It happened that about this time he chanced to see a party of young men shooting, and the sight of them so roused his longings that he determined then and there to leave the court and go back to his beloved forests. "There was a time," quoth he to himself, "when I was an archer so true and so strong that men said no one in Merry England could outdo me. Alas! alas! have I lost that prowess as I have lost my wealth? Ah! well-a-day! I see full well that if I dwell longer here with the king sorrow will kill me."

Straightway he sought audience with the king, and when he was admitted he went down upon his knee, saying, "My lord the King of England, grant me what I shall ask." Edward encouraged him to go on. "I built a chapel once, in Barnsdale," continued Robin, "a seemly place to look upon, and dedicated to Mary Magdalene. My heart misgives me that it is too long left and I would be there again. In this last week I have scarce slept a wink; nor have I had the will to eat or drink for the longing that is upon me to go to Barnsdale, and, in sooth, my liege, I have taken a vow that I will go there, if it be barefoot and in the penance shirt of wool."

Robin was always an arch plotter, and it may be that in framing his excuse for his desires he was but making out a case that he thought most likely to win him his way. For, in those days, a religious vow was respected above all things. There is no positive evidence that Robin Hood ever did build a chapel in Barnsdale, but on the other hand he is always portrayed as a man of honour

and very devout. He is said to have kept a chaplain for religious observances in the forest, and his enmity against ecclesiastics was aroused by the depravity of those persons, not at the holy offices they filled.

King Edward could find nothing to say against the boon that was asked, especially as Robin was so great a favourite of his. He only imposed a condition. "Since it is as you say," he answered, "why, then, we cannot mend matters. I give thee leave for seven nights, and no longer, to tarry at Barnsdale; after which time thou must to the court again."

"Gramercy, gramercy, lord king," quoth Robin, overcome with gratitude. He stooped again to his knee, took the most courteous leave of the king, and betook himself away to the woods of his own country that very day.

It must have been a long journey in those times even on horseback, and no doubt many adventures befell Robin on his journey northward. But as tradition does not deal with connecting links of that sort, and as I am inventing no episodes, but only giving what the old ballads contain, we must suppose him safely back to Yorkshire, or at least to Nottinghamshire, where we left his company.

He came on a merry morning, when the sun was bright, the air clear and pure—so much purer than the air of the court—when the birds were filling the air with joyous song. Blackbirds and thrushes were giving him a chorus of welcome; the earth and the green growth were sweet with a scent he knows well of old, and the brilliant hues of bright green and yellows and tawnies in the verdure contrasting with the rich deep olives of shade; the tender greys of the tree boles against patches

of silvery bracken and red and brown leaves upon the ground—all these things made him draw deep breaths of joy and contentment. "It is a long, long time since I was last here," he muttered, as he walked deeper and deeper into the forest. Soon some deer in the distance caught his eye, and the sportsman in him rose and filled him with other thoughts. "The dun deer," he cried; "I would like now to try my skill again in a little shot." So saying he bent his bow and brought down a fine large hart. He felt himself, at once, the old Robin Hood again. Running up to the quarry he put his horn to his lips and blew the old notes that assembled his men a year and a quarter ago.

It happened that the outlaws were just then within hearing distance, and they knew those notes at the first blast. With a deal of joy and anticipation they called to each other, and agreed that it was their captain's blast, so that within a little while, as Robin was busy with the hart he had slain, he was surrounded by men who came bursting through the undergrowth and racing across the clearings towards him, shouting and doffing their hoods and bending the knee to him. When they drew close, "Welcome, welcome to our master!" they shouted again and again. And Robin had much to do to greet every one and answer all the questions and ask a lot himself.

There, at any rate, was a large hart ready for dinner, and birds in plenty were brought down with little trouble, so no doubt they celebrated this home-coming of Robin Hood to the greenwood with one of those mighty feasts they knew so well how to undertake.

Robin must have felt the joy of unrestrained youth as he lay that night under the greenwood tree he knew and loved so well. Here were no panelled walls but the boles of trees ; no tapestry but the leaves ; no ceiling rafters but branches ; and no servitude at all.

XVIII

THE PINDAR OF WAKEFIELD

It is written that for twenty-two years from this time Robin Hood remained a forester, and never once during that time did he go again to the court, of which he maintained a dread.

During that twenty-two years many things must have happened well worth the telling, and I may well gather from the jolly old ballads some of the tales that are sung of Robin Hood, and tell them now before coming to the end of the outlaw's career.

There is one curious characteristic of many of the legends, which is, that Robin Hood continually gained recruits for his company by molesting men whom he thought sufficiently strong and brave; suffering severe punishment from their hands, and then, when he had taken all the cracks he could do with, crying a truce, making friends, and inviting his victor to join his company. Of this custom some instances have already been given.

There was a certain pindar who lived at Wakefield, and who used to boast that there was neither knight, squire, nor baron who dare let his beasts trespass in the manor at Wakefield without forfeiting the animals to the pound. A pindar was a pounder; that is to say, a man who was employed to take all stray cattle or other

animals and impound them; in other words, put them in the "pound" or fold kept for that purpose.

This pounder was a sturdy fellow, but in spite of that, Robin Hood, Scathelock, and Little John, hearing that he was a braggart, were eager to try conclusions with him. So they set out one day to Wakefield with this intent, armed with swords and bucklers, and in due time they found him taking his ease under a thorn tree.

"Now ye there, turn back, turn back," he cried, as they drew near. "Ye come a wrong way. Ye've forsaken the king's highway and made a path over the corn. Turn back again."

"Oh, it were a shame to bid us do that," answered Robin, "seeing that we are three and thou but one."

The pindar leapt to his feet. He was not used to being answered in that way. He got back as far as he could to the thorn, leaned his back against it, and planted his foot against a stone. Then they fell straight away to fighting. They fought long—a whole summer's day long, the ballad says. At least they fought until all their swords were broken off short, so that Robin began to think that the pindar had sufficiently proved himself; for at last he cried, "Hold thy hand, hold thy hand; and, my men, hold ye yours, for this pindar is one of the best that ever I tried with my sword." No doubt he had tried a many.

The pindar was as ready as any of them for a truce, so they all sat down, wiping their foreheads and panting. When they had rested a little and had grinned a little, and paid each other a few compliments, Robin asked the adversary whether he would forsake his pindar's craft

and live in the greenwood with' him. Doubtless he painted an alluring picture of the life.

The man replied, "At Michaelmas next my contract is out and I receive my wages. When I have got them I'll take my blade and plod with thee to the greenwood." So the compact was sealed.

Next Robin asked whether he had either meat or drink to offer him and his merry men.

"I have both bread and beef," said the pindar, "and the best of ale, too."

"Well, that is good enough," replied Robin, "for such unbidden guests," and forthwith they all repaired to the pindar's house, where he set before them a goodly table. After the meal they confirmed the contract, for Robin asked him again whether he would come to the greenwood, adding, "Thou shalt have a livery twice a year, a green one and a brown one."

"If Michaelmas were but here and gone again, and I had my wages, thou wouldst quickly see that I would set as little store by my master as he now doth by me."

Thus was another mighty and valiant man added to this redoubtable company of foresters.

XIX

THE TANNER

THERE was a similar gallant and fierce combat that befell between Robin and a tanner of Nottingham, Arthur-a-Bland by name. It was said that he could easily make any two or three flee out of his way by the use of his pike-staff.

One summer's morning he went to take a walk in the "forest of merry Sherwood" to look at the fine red deer that roamed abroad there, and who should he meet but Robin Hood. As soon as he espied this notable outlaw he thought of a way of having some sport with him. So he put on a very bold and aggressive front, marched up to Robin, and at once bade him "Stand." "What art thou, fellow," he cried, "that ranges here so boldly? To put it shortly, thou lookest uncommonly like a thief that has come to steal the king's deer. I would have you know that I am a keeper in this forest, in trust for the king, to keep a guard over his deer; therefore I must stay thee."

"If thou bee'st a keeper in this forest," answered Robin very quietly, "and hast so great a command, thou wilt need to have some help from thy fellows before thou makest me to stand."

"Nay, there is none here but me ; nor have I any need of others. I have here a good oak staff, and that will do all I want of it. As for thy sword and bow, I care not a straw for them, nor all thine arrows to boot. Let me but get a crack on thy bare skull and I warrant thou wilt shoot from here as quick as any arrow."

"Speak more mannerly, good fellow, and give me better terms, or else I will correct thy negligence."

"Oho ! Art thou so goodly a man ? I care not a fig for thee, big as thou tryest to look. Now have a care of thyself."

At this Robin Hood unbuckled his belt and laid it down with his bow. Then he pulled up a good strong oak sapling, saying, "I'll yield to thy weapon, since thou canst not yield to mine ; and here's a staff like thine own, and not half a foot longer. But before we begin the fray, let me measure ; for I will not have a longer than thou, lest thou shouldst think that foul play."

"I care not for a few inches," said the bold Arthur. "My staff is eight feet and a half. It will knock thee down easily ; it has knocked down many a calf before."

At this insult Robin's blood was up and he dealt the other a mighty thwack. The tanner reeled and the blood quickly began to trickle down his temples. But he soon recovered himself and in turn got in a staggering blow for Robin, which brought the blood down all around the forester's head. When he saw his own blood he raged as if he had been a wild boar, and Arthur-a-Bland laid on with regularity as if he had been chopping wood. And so they kept it up, each striving to maim the other, for two hours or more.

At last Robin cried, "Hbld thy hand, and let thy quarrel fall. We may stay here and thrash each other's bones to mash and neither get an advantage. And I promise thee that henceforth thou shalt be free of Sherwood forest."

"Thank thee for nothing," replied Bland. "I may thank my staff for my freedom, not thee."

"Good fellow, I prithee, what trade dost thou follow? Tell me also where thou dwellest, for I would fain know these things?"

"I am a tanner by trade and I work in Nottingham, and if thou wilt come there I promise thee that henceforth thou shalt have thy hide tanned for nothing." He opened his mouth in a loud guffaw as he finished this sally of wit, and Robin could not but like the man.

"Gramercy, good fellow, since thou art so kind, I will do as much for thee. And if thou wilt forsake thy trade, and live with me in the greenwood, I will give thee wages and much gold besides, for my name is Robin Hood."

"If thy name is indeed Robin Hood, as I verily believe it is, judging by thy handling of the staff, why then, here's my hand. Let us be friends. I will come into the greenwood with thee and we will never part. My name is Arthur-a-Bland."

So they fell to being mighty friendly after having tried to kill each other. But that was always the way in these good old times; the foulness of death and the charm of life ever went side by side.

"But tell me," said Arthur, "where is one called John Little, who is in your company? I would fain hear

something of him, for we are allied upon our mothers' side, and he is a dear kinsman of mine."

Robin made reply by blowing a blast upon his bugle horn, and in a very short while a figure was seen to come over a little hill that was near and run nimbly down its green side to where they stood.

"Oho! master, what's amiss?" asked Little John. "Thou standest with a staff in thy hand, and art bedraggled, and there is blood on thy head. I fear all is not well." And he looked fiercely at the tanner.

"O man! 'tis true I stand, and this man that stands beside thee maketh me to stand. He is a tanner, and an excellent master of his trade, for he hath tanned my hide soundly."

"If he can do such a feat to thee, master, he is to be commended; and if he be so stout a master, peradventure he will deign a bout with me and tan my hide too." And he prepared for a bout.

"Nay! Hold thy hand, Little John. As I understand it, he is a kinsman of thine. A good yeoman he is, too. Dost thou know his name, Arthur-a-Bland?"

"Arthur-a-Bland!" cried Little John, flinging away his staff and running to the tanner. When he had put his arms around Bland's neck, and when other tokens of delighted recognition had passed between the worthies, Robin took them both by the hand and they danced together singing, "Three merry men be we."

So there was another man of prowess joined to the outlaws. With such men in their ranks it is not surprising that townsfolk fled before them, notwithstanding the fact

that they were a sort of heroes to be envied and admired. In fact the outlaws seemed to command in this way the double emotions of worship and dread, since we read in some places of abettance and sympathy from the townsfolk and in others of their fleeing in fear before the sure aim and grim daring of the outcasts.

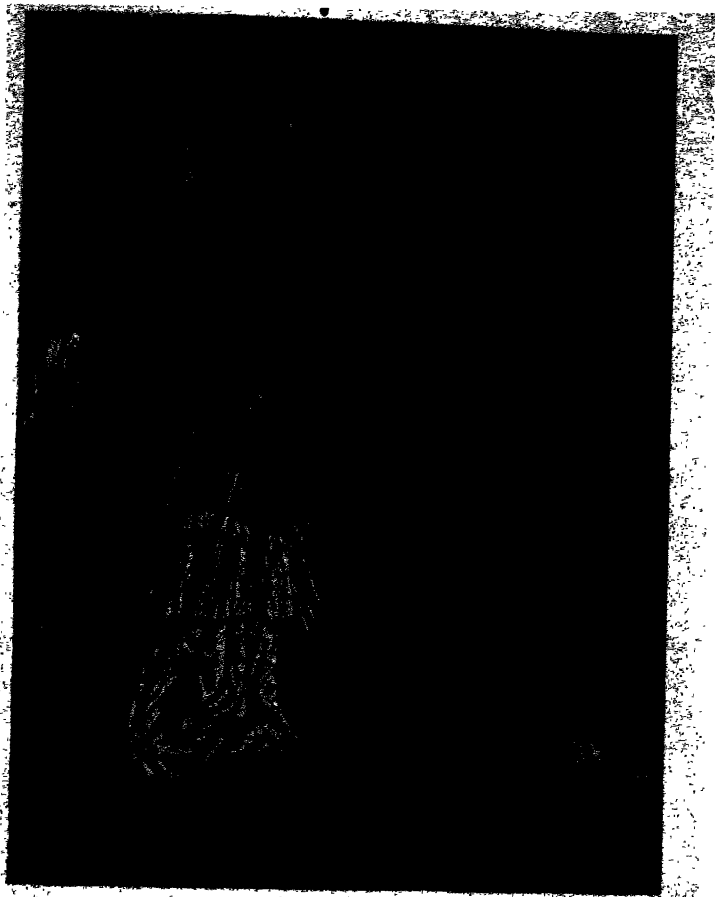
THE MARRIAGE OF ALLIN-A-DALE

ONE fine morning as Robin was looking up and down in the woods he saw a figure in the distance, and as he watched it drawing near he saw that it was a gay youth dressed in scarlet, who sang very merrily as he went. Presently he turned off into a bypath and disappeared.

The very next morning Robin saw him again coming by the same way, but this time he was anything but gay. He wore a sad-coloured suit instead of the bright red of yesterday, and he hung his head. As for his round-de-lay, there was now never a note that passed his lips; but instead came many a sigh and an oft-repeated "Alack!" and "Ah, well a day," and other such expressions by which swains and nymphs in these early days found relief for their feelings.

Suddenly lifting his head this mournful young man saw two foresters approaching him. At which he bent his bow in self-defence. "Stand off," he cried; "what is your will with me?"

But Little John and Mutch, the miller's son, who were the men he threatened, cared little for his show of boldness. They called back to him, "You must come before our master, straightway, under yon tree. He would know more of thee." They then led him up to Robin, who received him with courtesy, and asked him gently whether he had any money to spare.



Little John conducts a marriage service.

"I have no money," the young man replied, "but five shillings and a ring, and that I have kept for seven long years passed, to have it against my wedding day."

This roused Robin's curiosity, and he questioned the young man further, and drew from him by gentle encouragement the whole of his sorrowful tale.

"Yesterday should have been my wedding day, and I should have married a sweet maid that I love full well, but her people have taken her from me and given her to be the wife of an old knight, who is old enough to be her grandfather. Wherefore my heart is smitten sore."

"What is thy name, fair youth?"

"My name is Allin-a-Dale."

"What wilt thou give me, in ready gold, or in fee to be paid when thou canst, if I help thee to thy maiden again and deliver her safely into thine arms?"

"Alas! I have no money, nor ever shall have what thou mightest well ask for such a favour; but this I will do: I will swear upon the Holy Book to be thy true and faithful-servant for ever."

Robin mused, and then asked, "How many miles is it to where thy maiden is?"

"The matter of five miles and no more; for she is even now on her way to the church where she will wed the old knight."

"If that be so, no time must be lost," quoth Robin, and calling Little John and four-and-twenty of his bowmen, he placed himself under the guidance of Allin-a-Dale and set off hot-foot for the church.

When they had arrived there Robin took a harp from under his cloak and marched into the church and right up to where the bishop was busying himself, who, when

he saw the stranger come in so boldly, asked, "What dost thou here?"

"I am a harper, and, so please your grace, I dare swear there is no better in the north country."

"Then thou'rt right welcome, friend harper, for the music of the harp pleaseth me better than any," answered the bishop.

"That I am right glad to hear. But before I give thee of my music I would fain see the bride and the bridegroom that are to be married here this day."

At these words there came in at the doors the wealthy old knight to whom the maiden had been promised. He was both grave and feeble, and yet was attired in most gay clothes that ill befitted his age. After him came a smart damsel in a dress that glittered like gold.

"If this is the bridegroom and bride," quoth Robin, "it seemeth not to me a good match that you would make here this morning. Since we are all assembled now, I prithee let the bride choose what man she will for her own dear bridegroom."

At these bold and unusual words there was so much consternation, indignation, and outcry that Robin put his horn to his mouth and blew two or three blasts. This astounded the congregation even more, and their bewilderment was complete when four-and-twenty stout young bowmen came leaping up to the door and marched one behind the other into the church.

Allin-a-Dale headed them, to whom Robin spoke: "As I hear say, this maiden is thy true love, Allin. If that be so, and she hath nothing against it, ye shall be married before we leave this church."

The bishop was scandalised. "Knowst thou not,

young man, that the parties must be asked three times in the church, according to the law of the land? Thou canst not order things to thy liking even if thou wouldst."

Without more ado, Robin seized the bishop and took off his robe, at the same time commanding Little John to put it on. None durst interfere for dread of the archer guard that surrounded them. Little John robed himself and stepped with much gravity up into the choir. All the people laughed at the sight of him. He then proceeded to "ask" the parties in the general way, and he did so seven times, lest three should not be enough, as he explained.

He next conducted a marriage service according to his own notions, and when he said, "Who giveth this maid?" Robin responded with, "That do I, and he that taketh her from Allin-a-Dale shall buy her at a dear price."

Thus were Allin and his sweetheart, who "looked like a queen," made man and wife, and were well enough pleased with the ceremony. The bowmen conducted them safely away from the enraged elderly knight and his following, and then returned to the greenwood.



XXI

THE GOLDEN PRIZE

A DISGUISE was, as we have seen, a favourite ruse in these old days, and Robin Hood owed many of his adventures to this trick of passing himself off as somebody else. Indeed, it was his only safe method of travelling beyond the limits of his own haunts, since if he were easily recognisable a hundred hands would be ready to seize him for the sake of the reward that was held out for his capture in spite of the clemency and indulgence of King Edward II.

On one occasion the outlaw clothed himself in the garb of a friar, with gown and hood, rosary and crucifix. And it happened that after going two or three miles, he chanced upon two well-fed priests, clothed in black,

who came ambling towards him on their nags. "Now," thought Robin, "here's my chance." So putting on a look of weariness and fatigue, he hailed them as they came up to him. "Benedicite, brothers. Take pity upon me and cross my hand with a silver groat, for our dear Lady's sake. I have wandered all this day without bite or sup and am far spent."

"Now, by our Holy Dame," quoth they, "we have never a penny ourselves; for this very morning we were set upon by robbers in the highway from whom we could save nothing."

Robin looked them up and down and said quietly, "I am much afraid that ye both do tell lies, and I am resolved to try the truth of what ye say before ye go hence." At this the priests on their part seemed to have doubts of this mendicant friar, and with a common thought clapped spurs to the sides of their nags and trotted off as fast as they could. Robin girded up his robes and took to his heels after them, overtaking them in a few moments. He ran in between them, caught them each by the collar, and pulled them down from their horses. When they could speak, which was not for some seconds, being so taken by surprise, they bawled for mercy.

"Spare us! spare us, friar! Let thy remorse overcome thine anger!"

"You said you had no money. If that is so, let us all three without delay go on our knees and pray for some."

The priests had not the boldness to gainsay Robin, so down they went upon their knees at his behest and addressed petitions to their patron saint. "Send us, oh, send us some money to serve our present needs,"

they prayed. Robin kept them at it, bidding and exhorting them to urgency, so that they wailed aloud, and wrung their hands, and sometimes even wept, which delighted Robin so much that he broke out into a merry song.

When they had been at this for an hour and their knees ached fit to break, Robin said, "Now let us see what money heaven hath sent us. Whatever there be we will share and share alike, and never a one of us shall deceive the others. Therefore let us search ourselves." Then they all put their hands into their pockets and searched, but in vain, for no money came out in their hands. "This does not come to much," said Robin. "We must search each other," and he started searching one of the priests whilst the other knelt by and trembled. Presently he found a poke under the mantle that was heavy and big with gold, and at this he gave a mighty tug and wrenched it away. Pouring the contents out on the grass, he threw the empty wallet down beside the money and laid hold of the other priest. This time, having profited by his first search, he could go straight to the treasure-poke, and he had it out in a twinkling and emptied beside the other.

"Here is a brave show," he said. "It is good to see so much gold where none was before, and because ye prayed so heartily for it ye shall both have your part." It counted out to five hundred pieces. "Here are fifty pounds apiece for ye," he said, keeping the rest for himself. The priests sighed wondrous deeply, nor daring to say a word, for they were in mortal fear of this masterful man whom they had long since seen to be a robber in disguise. When they got up from their aching knees they made as if to depart. "Nay, nay," said

Robin ; " there is one thing more I have to say before ye go. Ye shall swear, here, upon this grass which our prayers have made holy, that never again, wherever ye go, ye will ever tell lies." This they swore.

" A second oath ye must swear is that ye shall never look tenderly upon maids or make love to other men's wives." This also they solemnly swore.

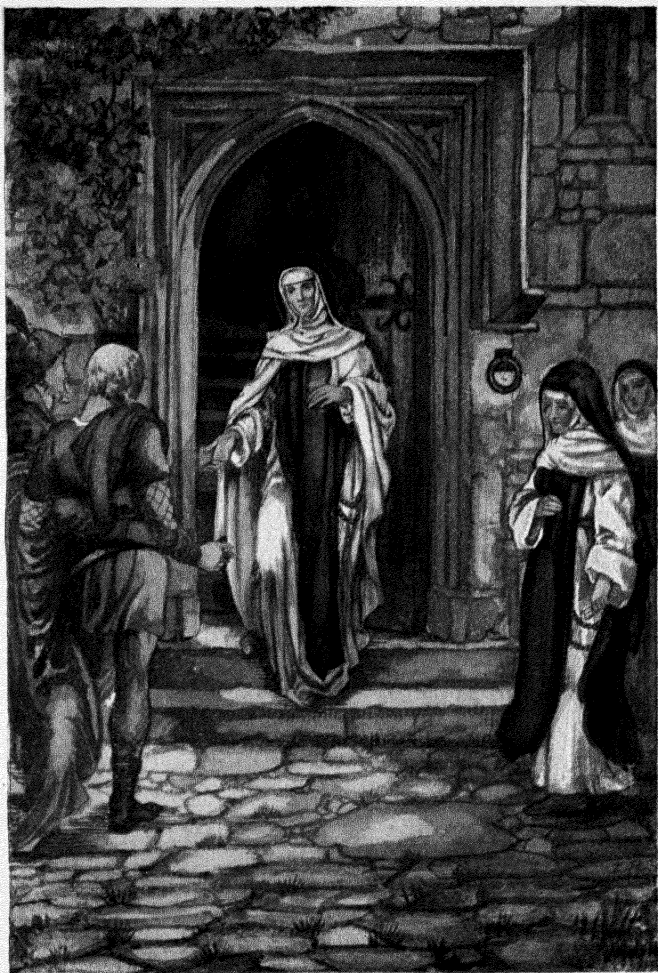
" The last oath ye shall take is that ye will at all times be charitable to the poor. Say to any that ye meet that ye have met with a holy friar, and I desire no more of ye." He then helped them on to their horses again, and away they rode with lighter burdens and hearts made heavier with vexation and anger. As for Robin, he lightly sped back to the greenwood tree, elated with mirth and joy and pride that he had done so good a day's work.

ROBIN HOOD'S DEATH AND BURIAL

THE adventures that have been related in the previous chapters do but give an idea of the kind of life the outlaws led. There were, of course, countless similar incidents spread over the whole period during which the band held together. Robin Hood and Little John were both old men when they died at last ; the first by betrayal, and the other, as it is said, by the hand of the law. We read that he was caught at last and hanged for some of his bold deeds.

At a time when these two were grey-haired men and were still devoted to each other, they were one day wandering over a common where the broom was blossoming and the bees humming about them. Robin felt weary and weak, and sat down to rest himself.

" Little John," he said, " it is many a long day since thou didst tumble me into the river with thy staff. We have shot for many a wager since then, but it seems to me that I am not able to shoot one shot more now ; or if I did, my arm is so feeble that my arrows would fly but little space. Perchance this weakness is but a passing sickness ; for thou art hale yet, John, and wherefore should my strength give out before thine ? I have a cousin, as thou knowest, down in yonder valley. She is a



Robin Hood arrives at Kirkley.

prioress and well skilled in medicine. Please God, she shall bleed me."

Little John helped his master to his feet and they journeyed on to Kirkley Hall, which was the name of the nunnery. But long before they reached it Robin grew worse, so that Little John feared that he would die. When at last they reached the portal and had knocked for admittance, the prioress herself came to open the door, knowing who was there, for she had seen their approach from a window.

"Cousin Robin," she said, "a welcome to thee and to thy man. Thou lookest pale, dear cousin, sit thee down. Art thou faint? Wilt thou drink ale or wine with me?"

"Nay, nay, dear cousin. I come to thee because I am ill. Thou hast skill to cure the sick. I want neither drink nor meat; but I would that thou shouldst let me some blood."

"That will I, Robin, if thou wishest it. I have a room which thou hast never seen yet. If thou wilt go in there I will bleed thee." She led him by the hand into this private room which was in a tower in a deserted part of the building. Little John after pressing his hand went out into the garden and waited.

The prioress opened a vein in Robin's arm and let a good lot of blood run. Then she left him, lying weak and languid with his arm still over the basin. When she went out she locked the door. Then she went to another chamber where a knight sat at a table luxuriantly spread.

"Who is it that takes thee away from my side?" said Sir Roger of Donkersley.

"It is my outlawed cousin, Robin Hood. He is ill

and has asked to be bled. I have bled him and now I wish to take counsel with thee as to what we shall do with him. He is worth one hundred pounds."

"Ay, he is worth more than that. Hast thou him safely, my sweet one?"

"Yea, in sooth, I have locked his chamber door, and he could never escape by the window even if he had strength to climb to the sill."

"Thou art a cunning lass. Shall we deliver him up alive or dead?"

"He is scarce alive now, and by to-morrow he will be dead, for I have left him bleeding."

So these two plotters passed the rest of the day, and the night too, in their heartless love-passages, thinking that on the morrow the body of Robin Hood would win them a reward.

Robin, upon finding that he was traitorously deserted, did his best to summon his strength to reach the casement; but when he looked out he found it too far to leap in his weakness. Then he thought of his horn and, placing it to his lips, he blew three faint blasts, scarcely audible from the ground. But the faithful Little John heard them. He was watching and waiting. He had been all the night under a tree awake and alert.

"Aha," he said, as he recognised the sound, "I fear my dear master is very near death that he bloweth so wearily; but I will go to him if it is through stone walls."

He entered the hall noiselessly, for all was quiet, and made as well as he could think how for the room from which he had heard the bugle. Two or three closed doors he broke open whilst finding his way. At last he came to

the room where Robin was, for he whispered at the key-hole and was answered. Then he put his knee to the door and breaking the lock entered.

When he saw Robin's condition he fell at his master's feet. "Master," he cried, "a boon, grant me a boon I beg of thee."

"What is that boon, Little John, that thou wouldst beg?"

"It is that I should burn Kirkley Hall and all its nunnery to the ground."

"Nay! that I cannot grant thee, John. I never yet hurt a woman, nor a man in woman's company. I cannot, at the end of my days, do so. Give me my bow, Little John, and I will shoot an arrow, and where the arrow falleth, there dig me a grave. When thou hast buried me, with my bow by my side, cover me with the green turf and let all men know that Robin Hood lies there."

Little John held him in his arms and with tearful eyes promised all he wished. Robin took his bow and arrow and, drawing it up as far as he could with the strength that was left him, he let an arrow fly. It fell at a spot that was hidden from the sight of those in the hall. John duly marked it, then laying Robin down upon the floor he stooped over him until he had breathed his last.

It was now noon, and yet the prioress had not come. The faithful forester waited beside the body until dusk; then he stole out and crept about the gardens till he found the gardener's shed. Taking from it a spade and mattock he went to the spot where the arrow had fallen and worked until he had dug a deep grave. Then in the silence of the night he crept again to Robin's room, and taking the lifeless form of his beloved master on his back he carried it to the

grave, wrapped it in both their mantles, laid it in with the bow, and covered in the earth, replacing the sods.

So the wicked cousin got no penny of the price upon Robin's head.

In due time Little John told many people of the death of Robin Hood, and in the course of years it became publicly known where he was buried, and some kind-hearted admirer of the bold outlaw erected over the grave a stone which bore this epitaph :—

Here, underneath this little stone,
Lies Robert, Earl of Huntingdon.
No archer was as he so good,
And people called him Robin Hood.
Such outlaws as he and his men
Will England never see again.

